Novel and Nation in the Muslim World

Literary Contributions and National Identities

EDITED BY
ELISABETH ÖZDALGA AND
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I&N

Islam and Nationalism Series

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One of the main objectives of this series is to explore the relationship between Islam, nationalism, and citizenship in its diverse expressions. The series intends to provide a space for approaches that recognize the potential of Islam to permeate and inspire national forms of identification, systems of government as well as its capacity to inspire oppositional politics, alternative modes of belonging, and the formation of counterpublics in a variety of local, national, or transnational contexts.

By recognizing Islam as a transnational phenomenon and situating it within transdisciplinary and innovative theoretical contexts, the series will showcase approaches that examine aspects of the formation and activation of Muslim experience, identity, and social action. In order to do justice to, and make better sense of contemporary Islam, the series also seeks to combine the best of current comparative, genuinely interdisciplinary research that takes on board cutting-edge work in sociology, anthropology, nationalism studies, social movement research,

and cultural studies as well as history and politics. As research on Islam as a form of identity is rapidly expanding and as interest both within the academia and within the policy community is intensifying, we believe that there is an urgent need for coherent and innovative interventions, identifying the questions that will shape ongoing and future research and policy, as well as exploring and formulating conceptual and methodological responses to current challenges.

The proposed series is intended to play a part in such an effort. It will do so by addressing a number of key questions that we and a large number of specialist interlocutors, not only within the academia, the policy community, but also within Muslim organizations and networks, have been grappling with. Our approach is premised on our understanding of *Islam* and the concept of the *nation* as resources for social identification and collective action in the broadest sense of these terms, and on the need to explore the ways in which these interact with each other and inform public debate, giving rise to a diversity of experiences and practices.

We would like to thank the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, for their support in initiating the series.

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Introduction

Elisabeth Özdalga

Is fiction for leisure only? This is a redundant question for the humanist involved in literary studies. However, it is not so for scholars in the social and political sciences, since the division of labor among academic disciplines has largely cut off political and social scientists – as scholars – from the realm of letters. Fiction, especially prose, is a source of knowledge too significant to be ignored in the study of social and political relationships. Years ago, Dennis Wrong in *Power: Its Forms and Uses* (1979) expressed the same idea by saying that problems pertaining to state and society were too vital and complex to be left to the social sciences only. The analysis of power and authority – the main subjects of his work – had much to gain from fictional literature. Not unexpectedly, Wrong supported his analysis of the ambivalent nature of legitimate authority by quoting at length from the episode of the inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.

For several decades, literary studies have been moving from an exclusive preoccupation with aesthetics to inclusion of an interest in the social contexts of various literary productions. Both Azade Seyhan and Gregory Jusdanis, among the contributors to this book, are recognized representatives of this wider, sociologically oriented perspective. By contrast, it seems there has been a greater reluctance among social and political scientists to include fiction in their studies. With few exceptions, Dennis Wrong's pioneering work has not gained much traction. The purpose of this book is to illustrate, with the help of 11 case studies from various Muslim majority countries, the benefits of taking fictional literature into account in the study of religious and national identities. Taken together, the case studies show different aspects of how the complex entanglement of nation, religion, and modernity, in context of political and cultural identity formation, is probed and verbalized in prose fiction.

Within the larger domain of social and political science issues, this book addresses the problem of nationhood. A fundamental tenet is that under modernity, the state (the modern nation-state) has become a more significant institution (or aggregate of institutions) in the daily life of the ordinary citizens than any premodern state, ancient or feudal, ever was. This contention is based on the assumption that the individual citizen encounters the state more directly than was the case in earlier epochs of human history. Charles Taylor describes what he calls the "direct-access society" in the following way: "In whatever many ways I am related to the rest of society through intermediary organizations, I think of my citizenship as separate from all of these. My fundamental way of belonging to the state is not dependent on or mediated by any of these . . . I stand, alongside all my fellow citizens, in direct relationship to the state, . . . the object of our common allegiance" (2004: 159). The counterimage is offered by premodern political systems, built on estates and other communitarian structures. In such systems, the individual was connected to king/state through several personalized relationships: child to father; father to landlord; landlord to feudal lord; feudal lord to king. In a somewhat different way, Norbert Elias (2001) argued that whereas in premodern society, family, tribe, and village served as a "survival unit," in modern societies, it is the state that plays that role for individuals. The state has drawn closer to the individual and has become a more significant part of his/her daily life than ever before.

The primary focus of this study is not the state as an aggregate of formal institutions, but the ways in which individual citizens identify with the nation, understood both as a political and a cultural community. The nation as a political community concerns the relationship of individuals to the state and deals with mutual rights and obligations. In this perspective, the nation is a group of people bound together as citizens, irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, and other loyalties. The nation as cultural community, by contrast, relates to senses of shared belonging, mostly through linguistic, ethnic, and/or religious identities (Heywood 2007). In the chapters of this book, both aspects are present, even though the main emphasis is on the second, the nation understood as a cultural community.

What makes fictional literature an especially significant source in the study of nationhood is its abundance of identity-related narratives. Linking prose and nation opens the doors to a new realm of research, and the purpose of the present volume is principally exploratory and experimental. Thus stated, the major motives for our book are threefold. The first arises from the idea that prose (i.e. novels, short stories, plays)

can be read as reflections or mirror images of national identities and/or public sentiments. The second dwells on the function of fictional literature as agents in the formation of identities, especially of the nationals concerned. And the third concerns the respect and esteem (symbolic capital) rendered by the wider international community thanks to the existence of a powerful corpus of national literature and, as an effect of that, the efforts by educated and/or ruling elites to launch and bolster such literary manifestations as part of the nation-building project.

Novels as mirrors

I have found Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* (1994 [1956–57]) especially powerful in exposing the linkage between novel and nation. Notwithstanding an already abundant literature on Mahfouz's authorship (Le Gassick 1991; Beard and Haydar 1993; El-Enany 2007), I am here venturing a "nationalist" reading of his work as an illustration of the arguments raised above. His monumental work represents a telling example of an epic, which reflects the lives and inner worlds of individuals from very different walks of life in Cairo in the 1920s and 1930s, a critical period in the formation of Egypt as a modern nation. The political events, narrated through the family members of the patriarch Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, their relatives, friends, and business companions, run like an undercurrent throughout the novel. The family, depicted over three generations, is first portrayed as a durable and solid institution, built on strong solidarity. As the generations shift, the family splits, never to reemerge in its traditional form. And as time goes by, the individuals become more autonomous and directly exposed to the various institutions of the state, or organizations within it, and the public sphere.

The characters, narrated through an intricate web of public events and interpersonal relationships, are complex, often revealing inner contradictions. Hopes run high about the country's national independence and progress; however, prospects are tragically thwarted. For Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's youngest son Kamal, the author's alter ego, the disillusionment and frustration at the outcome of the struggle for full national independence is symbolically represented in his experience of an unrequited, albeit Platonic love affair. Young Aïda comes from an upper-class family, well embedded in diplomatic circles and with strong connections with France and other esteemed countries in the West. The story reveals how Kamal's uplifted feelings toward her are eventually dashed,

in a way analogous to the betrayal by imperial Western powers of the Egyptian people's hopes for national independence. The emotional intensity inherent in Kamal's concern for the well-being and international standing of his own country could not have been brought to the fore so powerfully without the intervention and invocation of another symbolic event or experience, the adoration, almost worship, of young Aïda. Only in this way could Kamal's sublime love for his country avoid being expressed as overwrought nationalism.

Mahfouz's novel offers ample illustration of the various dispositions or habits at work among individual actors in this drama. The grandchildren of Ahmad Abd al-Jawad come of age in the Egypt of the 1930s. Youngsters from the same family find outlets in various political movements: one joins the Communist Party, another the Islamists around the Muslim Brotherhood. In terms of family upbringing, lifestyle, and values, they share similar backgrounds. Still, they go in opposite directions in terms of political engagement. However, beyond these differences stands the question of the future regional and international status of Egypt. The basic concern, cutting across political ideologies, is the question of Egypt's future as a fully independent nation. It is in that context that their dispositions and actions have to be interpreted.

Novels as agents

The question raised in this section concerns the possible influence of the novel on the formation of identities, especially of the nationals themselves. The dialogues in Mahfouz's novel are often combined with long inner deliberations, offering insights into the deeper or wider motives behind the actions and attitudes of various characters. No reader could easily remain untouched by such revelations. The novel has the potential to strengthen the self-consciousness, and hence the personal and/or collective (national) identity of the reader.

Benedict Anderson (1983) has pointed to another effect of fictional literature in the formation of national identities – eloquently described as "imagined communities" – namely the tearing down of the walls of individual separation, isolation, and/or privacy. Through the narratives conveyed in novels, individuals gain deeper insights not only into their own selves, but also into the selves of other individuals from different walks of life. In this way, the repertoire of available "others" in the constitution of individual and social identities increases considerably. The novel thus becomes a significant participant in the process of the formation of nationhood, that is, it contributes to the formation of the idea

(or imaginings) of the modern nation, and the notions of self in the minds of readers/citizens.

Fictional literature as participant in the nation-building project

The third rationale for linking novel and nation derives from a theory developed by Gregory Jusdanis in *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (1992), and it is further elaborated in *The Necessary Nation* (2001). His work constitutes a theoretically more developed argument than the foregoing ones, which are more provisional. According to Jusdanis, nations are formed in competition with each other, with weaker nations experiencing an urge to catch up with those perceived to be more advanced. The experience of underdevelopment or backwardness, so often heard in relation to the "Third World" vis-à-vis the "West," is by no means limited to present-day developing countries. In fact, this syndrome was found in earlier periods of European history among the latecomers to modernity, such as Germany, Greece, Spain, and Portugal, in relation to the forerunners, such as Britain, Holland, and France.

In the studies mentioned above, Jusdanis maintains that people use culture to bring about social change. One example is provided by the idea that fictional literature, and especially the novel as a genre, plays out as an important strand in the struggle to assert one's own nation vis-à-vis more advanced ones. Fictional literature is rallied or mobilized as an important resource, since a tradition of strong novelists provides a country with prestige and status, even where, in other respects, it is considered less advanced or even backward. Russia in the nineteenth century is a telling example. So is Egypt in the post-war era.

Novel and nation in the Muslim world

Why a book on novel and nation in the Muslim world? For one thing, this cultural field constitutes a general research interest among the initiators of this book, and there is an apparent dearth of studies on it. Beyond that, the answer is closely related to the above discussion in which it was suggested that Muslim majority states generally are nation-states in the making. Following Jusdanis (1992, 2001), including his chapter in this book, the use of fictional literature for political, especially nationalistic, purposes belongs to a certain phase in the nation-building process. A key element in that process is the experience of belatedness

and, based on that, a conscious effort to catch up with more developed nations with the help of culture, specifically fictional literature. For consolidated nation-states, that chapter largely belongs to the past, which means less political pressure on literary production in the present. By contrast, in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world, this phase is more current and present. Thus, we are here dealing with politico-cultural contexts in which the novel–nation problematic can be studied as it evolves and unfolds. Among the cases presented in this volume, this is most evident in Hashem Ahmadzadeh's analysis of Kurdish fictional literature, where a Kurdish nation-state is still but a vision projected into an uncertain future, and also for conflict-ridden, not yet fully consolidated states, such as Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan (British India).

All the countries that are the focus of the case studies in this book are Muslim-majority states. This means they are all part of the same Islamic civilization. In addition, all of them, more or less, suffer from instability and/or lack of institutional consolidation. Institutional deficiency is true not only of civil-war ravaged Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, but also of Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and British India/Pakistan. Seemingly more stable nation-states, such as Turkey and Iran, still have a long way to go before a more settled order is in place. The connection between these two strands – religion and instability – is not causal. The instability and/or belatedness is related to the way in which the world economic order has developed under modernity rather than to any inherent characteristic of the Islamic religio-cultural heritage. This does not mean that the importance of culture is ignored in our approach. On the contrary, this study is based on the assumption that culture, here considered in the form of fictional literature, is a factor to take account of in the formation of nations as political and cultural communities.

What unites the case studies in this book is the prominent presence of an Islamic heritage, but the choice of cases within this larger civilizational domain is based on cultural and linguistic diversity. Too often, Islam or Islamic culture is exclusively identified with the Arabic language and its literature, as well as with Arabic nationhood, especially as represented by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine that are all countries with a strong literary tradition (see e.g. Suleiman and Muhawi 2006). In this study, we have chosen to steer away from the Arabic core and instead emphasize more outlying states such as Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen and non-Arabic countries and/or areas such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kurdistan, and British India (the Muslim community).

This focus has several advantages. First, attention is drawn to the scope of cultural and linguistic variation within the Islamic world. This in turn counteracts essentialist notions of Islam. Second, it emphasizes the multiethnic contexts within which many national communities and/or identities are shaped in the Muslim world. Third, it also underlines the importance of defining and clarifying the wider historical and political context. Fourth, by examining the fringes, less mainstream and less well-known literary productions are uncovered and brought to the fore. Finally, the exploratory character of the study is a call for a more experimental, non-systematic approach: our purpose is not to vindicate specific theories and hypotheses, but to generate new ideas.

Presentation of the chapters

The authors of this volume are drawn from different fields in the humanities and the social sciences and constitute a medley that is both multidisciplinary and colorful. The book is divided into five parts: one introductory and four comprising mainly geographical clusters of case studies. The first set of such studies relates to Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Kurdish-speaking areas of eastern Turkey and northern Iraq. The second covers North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, and Libya) and the third the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) and Iraq. The last part addresses non-Arab nations further to the east (Iran and the Muslim communities of British India). Since the initiative for this book was taken by scholars connected to the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, there is an overrepresentation of authors from the Scandinavian countries. In spite of their small size, Sweden and the other Nordic countries can pride themselves on a relatively long tradition of Oriental research, a tradition carefully nurtured by universities, research institutes, and sponsoring foundations.

In addition to this book overview, the introductory section contains a chapter by Gregory Jusdanis, which represents the key theoretical contribution to this volume. For more than 20 years, Jusdanis has worked on problems related to fictional literature and nationalism, especially in a European and Latin-American context (1992, 2001). What many view as a new "discovery" – studying nations and nationalism through novels – is for him a well-established research agenda. Jusdanis in his contribution to this volume outlines with great poise and in broad brush strokes the close affinity between national literature and nationalism; emphasizes, for most countries, the importance of a literary canon, comparable to other symbolic expressions of nationhood such as a flag, an army, a

bureaucracy, and a legal system; points to splits and divisions within the same nation and how this is reflected in literary texts; underlines the transnational aspects of nationalism; and highlights paradoxes, such as the distinction between texts being bound to a particular nation, but not necessarily representative of that nation. These observations are situated within a historically oriented framework, where nationalism is firmly anchored in modernity. The overall question Jusdanis reflects on in his chapter is the future prospects for literature as we know it today. Is there, for example, a place for the novel in a society where more and more communication is expected to take place in cyberspace? Are we already in a post-national and post-literary era?

The first case study deals with Turkey. The author, Azade Seyhan, is a professor of German and comparative literature, but she has written extensively on Turkish literature, for instance in *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001) and *Tales of Crossed Destinies: The Modern Turkish Novel in a Comparative Context* (2008). Turkey has a rich literary tradition, and novel writing goes back almost a century and a half. Still, the experience of belatedness, of lagging behind the more advanced nations of the West, has been a typical preoccupation of Turkish writers and intellectuals. Where Jusdanis has emphasized the political effects of belatedness, a state of mind that promotes literary production for the good of the nation, Seyhan gives a different – more existentialist – interpretation of this experience. According to her, rather than being a sign of backwardness, belatedness is an integral aspect of modernity itself. The famous lines from *Communist Manifesto* – "All that is solid melts into air" – contain the explanation of this experience. Under modern/rational capitalism, social transformation is so deep, stirring, and pervasive that people are generally unable to keep up; therefore, they experience themselves as always being a step behind. The feeling of belatedness is itself an indication that a nation is under the spell of modernity. It is through narratives, literary or otherwise, that this predicament finds articulation. Seyhan (2008: 1–2) writes:

> Nothing allows us a more insightful access into other times and cultures than narratives. The relentless passage of time brings in its wake inevitable surges of amnesia and awakens in human consciousness a sense of irredeemable loss. From the desire to reclaim what is lost or beyond reach spring narratives that connect us to our pasts and to others in webs of intimacy and memory as well as in webs of enmity and error. Such narratives respond to the universal human need for identification or affiliation with a clan, a community, a religious or

ethnic group, or a state. Contingencies of history and politics, how-
ever, pose a constant threat to any stabilization of collective identity,
for these entangle us in the histories of numerous others, leading
to fragmentation and reconfiguration of allegiances. It is precisely
because of the unstable and unpredictable nature of life and history
that we draw on fiction to lend in retrospect sense, unity, and dignity
to fragmented lives and times.

Seyhan's overall aim is to settle accounts with Orientalism, specifically
to question essentialist notions based on the West versus Islam. This too
is Jusdanis's intent, but his mode of argument is different.

In her contribution to this volume, Seyhan elaborates on narratives
related to the encounter between Islamists and Westernizers. In no other
country in the Muslim world has secularism been as deeply embed-
ded in official ideology as in Turkey, a discourse, however, that has not
gone unchallenged. The secularism–Islamism rift runs deep in Turkish
national identities. Seyhan's chapter deals with these divides and how,
in various ways, they were represented by some of the well-known
novelists of the early republican period – Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889–
1956), Halide Edip Adıvar (1884–1964), and Yakup Karaosmanoğlu
(1889–1974).

Chapter 3, by Zaur Gasimov, examines Azerbaijan, which offers
a different experience. Azerbaijani national identity, as it is known
today ("Azerbaycanli olmak" – being a citizen of Azerbaijan), devel-
oped during the Soviet era, but it has its roots in an unusually mixed
linguistic, ethnic, and religious environment. Caucasia is notorious as
a borderland, where Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Russian influences
have mixed intensively and extensively. The Russian influence became
especially noticeable after the czarist conquests of this region in the
Russian–Persian wars of 1806–18. The transnational context of the early
twentieth century was based on dense networks, in which the educated
elite could read and communicate in three languages as they traveled
between cities such as Istanbul, Tabriz, Baku, Tiflis, and Kazan. The
literary work analyzed in this chapter is a play entitled *My Mother's
Book*, written in 1918–19 by the Azeri author Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə
(Celil Memedkuluzade 1869–1932) and staged in Baku in 1923 and
Tiflis in 1924. The historical context, with all its linguistic, ethnic,
and religious diversities, dynamics, and transformations, is carefully
delineated. So is the plot of the play, its author, his intellectual envi-
ronment, and the reception of the play from the 1920s until recent
times. This chapter offers ample illustration of how Muslim identities

have been asserted and carved out in a highly multiethnic, borderline environment.

Chapter 4 by Hashem Ahmadzadeh deals with Kurdish nationalism, or rather proto-nationalism. In this chapter, the reader encounters a relatively new literary tradition that has developed in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, all countries where Kurds are part of the original population but constitute a minority. In addition, because of the political repression of Kurdish minorities that has forced many people to take refuge outside their own countries, a fifth category of diaspora Kurds has developed, especially in Europe. The literature referred to in Ahmadzadeh's chapter originates in all five contexts. A shared, overall theme is the ethnic (or nationalistic) and political resistance to the repression by the ruling elites of their own "homelands" and the quest for a Kurdish nation and nation-state. What complicates the formation of a common Kurdish nationalist discourse, however, is not only the existence of fragmented citizenships and very complex strategic political issues, but also the fact that the Kurdish language is divided into two main "dialects," Kurmanji and Sorani – Northern and Southern Kurdish – and three different orthographies, based on the Arabic/Persian, Latin, and Cyrillic alphabets. These predicaments are brought to the fore and problematized in some novels, while, in others, the nationalist impulses weigh more heavily and are expressed in bolder, more explicit terms.

The next part deals with three North-African countries: Algeria, Morocco, and Libya. The history of colonialism and the struggle for national liberation weigh heavily on the literary productions in those countries. Of the three, Algeria has been most deeply involved in and affected by these developments. In Chapter 5, Abdelkader Aoudjit analyzes the Algerian novelist Kateb Yacine's well-known novel *Nedjma* from 1956. In it, the crucial issue is raised of how to relate to and narrate a history that is not entirely one's own, but forced on the nation by an intruder. In his analysis, Aoudjit points to the "deep grammar" (Wittgenstein) that underlies colonial history, namely the difficulties experienced by nationals in freeing themselves from the colonizer's hegemonic narratives without taking refuge in a romanticized view of primordial, ethnically pure origins. Based on the assumption that literary form and content are closely connected, Aoudjit's analysis concentrates on the structural forms of the novel. The novelist Kateb developed various techniques by which the complexity and confusion of the whole colonial/postcolonial experience can be articulated. With ample illustrations from the narrative itself, Aoudjit demonstrates the effects achieved by shattering the chronological order; by having the same event narrated by different characters; by depicting the past

through reflections and dreams of the characters; by including reflections on the fictional character of the narrative. Through these and other techniques, the novelist has been able to evoke the idea that historical representations are in fact constructions.

Morocco's experience of colonialism was shorter, less dramatic, and less pervasive. However, as much as the monarchy has been a stabilizing factor, it has also served as a brake on social and economic reform. Morocco is therefore a country with major development problems, including high rates of illiteracy, something that directly affects literary production in the country. In Chapter 6, Florian Kohstall analyzes three Moroccan novels published in 1956, 1967, and 2010, respectively. All focus on the vulnerable parts of the population, such as lower-class people, people who cannot even make a living for themselves, and street children. Because they offended the establishment, these novels triggered heated debate in Morocco and abroad. An important insight conveyed by Kohstall is that fictional literature represents a field in which highly critical and controversial issues related to national identities are formed and expressed, issues that are meant to challenge the officially endorsed and exalted notion of nationhood.

Libya resisted colonization for a long time. In *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), Edward Evans-Pritchard provided an illuminating analysis of the religious and tribal forces that, combined, were able to keep foreign invaders at bay after the Ottomans departed in 1912. It was only under Mussolini, during the 1920s, that Italy was able to conquer these areas, but at the cost of almost total devastation. The modern novel has really not had a chance to develop under these circumstances. Modern literary works did not enter the market until the 1980s, and literary production has been modest. Tetz Rooke's contribution, Chapter 7, is an analysis of the work of Kamil Hasan Maqhur (1935–2002), considered to be one of the best writers of his generation. The chapter particularly centers on expressions of collective identities and possible inner tensions. Bearing the precariousness of Libya as a nation-state in mind, as well as the burgeoning character of Libyan fiction, the question of the impact of such early literature on the formation of national identities renders this chapter especially interesting.

The third part focuses on the Arabian Peninsula – Saudi Arabia and Yemen – and Iraq. In Chapter 8, Madawi Al-Rasheed analyzes a very different stratum of Saudi Arabian society, namely young, well-educated women who, during the past decade, have raised their voices against the old guard. The Wahhabi ʿ*ulamāʾ* do not have the monopoly on cultural and political identities any longer, and it is especially the young Saudi women who challenge the establishment. This chapter analyzes recent

literature in the light of social, political, cultural, and economic developments and argues that the new literature deconstructs traditional national identities. Instead, the Saudi novel has moved into terrain colored by a neoliberal, cosmopolitan fantasy. The chapter concentrates on two women novelists, Raja al-Sani (b. 1980), author of the bestseller *Girls of Riyadh* (2004), and Samar al-Muqrin, whose *Women of Vice* appeared in 2008.

Yemen is a country with a double history – North and South. Formally united in 1990, the country is still rent by tribal and other political divisions and is very vulnerable to economic and political shifts in the region, such as when 800,000 Yemenites were expelled from Saudi Arabia because Yemen decided not to support the coalition forces in the Gulf War of 1990–91. Modern novel writing is fairly new to Yemen. Søren Hebbelstrup, author of Chapter 9, presents two productions, but concentrates on the young novelist Wajdi al-Ahdal (b. 1973) and his acknowledged as well as controversial *The Quarantine Philosopher* (2007). The allegorical and satirical form of the novel suggests many interlaced levels of narrative linked to history; that is, social and political criticism; tribal, class, and interpersonal relationships and conflict; art and fiction. The novel presents a grim picture of Yemeni society – "graves" and "worms" – and Hebbelstrup is hesitant about the extent to which the novel should be read, as social and political criticism or as an expression of national identity and belonging or as both. The author also considers the possible impact of this elitist novel on the larger, poorly educated Yemenite society.

For the chapter on Iraq (Chapter 10), Sami Zubaida has chosen the novel *The Last of the Angels* (1992) by poet and novelist Fadhil al-Azzawi (b. 1940). The setting is Kirkuk in northern Iraq in the 1940s and 1950s, a region characterized by a multiethnic composition and a prominent Turcoman population (and culture), together with Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, and Jews. The characters are described through their popular religious beliefs and practices, their magic and miracles, and their veneration of saints. It is within this mental framework that the ordinary people of Kirkuk wage their struggle against the powerful British Iraq Oil Company and in that process encounter national modernity. Political Islam, as it is known in Egypt through the Muslim Brotherhood, is absent from this narrative, which Zubaida interprets as indicating the volatile and context-sensitive character of identities.

The fourth part of the book focuses on Iran and British India. Chapter 11 by Claus Valling Pedersen looks at Iran in the early twentieth century, from about the time of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution

in 1906 to the outbreak of World War II. In terms of literary production, this period saw premodern, early modern, and modernist forms of literature, and, in addition, a genre of utopias/dystopias. Pedersen focuses on two novels falling into the last category, the utopian *An Assembly of Lunatics* (1924) by Abdol Hoseyn San'atizâde (1875–1973) and the dystopian *S.G.L.L.* (*Serum Gegen Liebes-Leidenschaft*) (1931), a short story by Sâdeq Hedayât (1903–48). In their different ways – the first is premodern and the second modernist in literary style – these two pieces deal with the predicament of being an individual in the modern world, where science and rationality can pave the way to liberation as well as to oppression and total destruction. By interweaving these ambivalent narratives into the history of the early modernization and nation-building process, Pedersen provides new insights into the intellectual roots of Iranian nationhood.

The last chapter (Chapter 12) by Torkel Brekke deals with two novels written by Rahi Masoom Raza (1925–92), *A Village Divided* and *Dewdrops*. Raza was an Indian novelist and playwright of Shiʿa background, and he became especially famous for his many successful Bollywood scripts. The novel is important in shedding light on the South Asian Muslim identity. It describes the local feuds and love stories of the village of Gangauli, shortly before the partition of 1947. The significance of the religious identities of the Shiʿas, Hindus, and untouchables in everyday village life is revealed in the narratives, and Brekke notes how, through the novel, the reader becomes aware of the speed with which the situation changed during this critical period in Pakistan's early history. The novel is instructive about how macro-level politics are connected to the experiences of the people at the local level. The novel is written in Hindi, not Urdu, so as to challenge narrow-minded discourses on religious and national identities.

The book ends with an afterword by coeditor Daniella Kuzmanovic. In it, she reflects on the role of alternative narrative genres mediated through film, TV, and Internet and, through them, the continued legacy of the novel as a technique for structuring narratives about nationhood.

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1
The End of Literary Narratives?

Gregory Jusdanis

We have known for a long time that the relationship between literature and nationalism is a symbiotic one, the one reinforcing the other. Nationalism gave literature purpose and literature endowed nationalism with form. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine the one without the other. If each mode of political organization expresses and is expressed by its own technology, we can say that nationalism was a textual affair. Obviously, this does not mean that books brought about the nation. We do not want to reduce a social, political, and cultural movement to a technology. What we mean is that the mode of disseminating ideas on the nation was originally textual. By the same token, we can argue that the national age amassed diverse texts into one body and called it "literature." While epics, lyrics, drama, satire, and novels had been fashioned for centuries, only the nation grouped them together for the first time and granted them a shared mission.

Nationalism, in short, emerged in the age of print and was made possible by this technology, which enabled rebels and intellectuals to reproduce information about unfair taxation, colonial oppression, or lack of political representation and disseminate it quickly.[1] Nationalism was so textually textured, it would be hard to conceive the emergence of nation-states in the late eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth centuries without the efficiencies provided by the printing press. Literature itself was also made possible by print. By "literature" I mean a collection of writing, usually considered non-instrumental (i.e. useless), contained within the institution of art, and encompassing texts from Homer's epics to the latest avant-garde experimentations. Literature is vastly different from what existed before modernity. In earlier ages, for instance, we had poetry, tragedy, romance, but no literature per se as an amalgamation of aesthetic writing, differentiated from functional

texts such as newspapers, how-to manuals, legal documents, and political tracts. It appeared and was made possible by the efficacies of print that allowed for easy reproduction and that gave the impression of a single author, unchanging text, and original voice.

These two unlikely discourses, nationalism and literature, one utilitarian and the other unusable, appeared at roughly the same time, mutually supportive, like two friends. A sign of modernity, they promoted modernization in turn, giving rise for the first time in the history of the world to nation-states, nationalities, literature, and national literature. Nationalism and literature both embodied and expressed a new time–space, culture–politics continuum. Although partly a geographical, partly a political, and partly a cultural concept, the nation represented a leap into the future, a capture of time. In the nation, literature itself acquired a temporal dimension, expressing the time period of the community, while also representing the new territorial entity. Literature was conscripted to tell a story of a new political and topographical venture, to heighten the emotional and imaginative potential of the state. Generally, national literature signifies this new institution written in *the* or *a* language of the nation and containing the literary texts (novels, poems, short stories) that *supposedly* replicate national reality and differentiate this reality from that of its neighbors.

Of course, the contradictions of the nation began to poke through the cover of national literature immediately. Very few nations were bound by one language, and fewer still had the ethnic, racial, or religious homogeneity that nationalist ideology advocated. And on top of it, literature did not reflect national identity like the surface of a lake mirroring surrounding mountains. Nevertheless, national literature began to acquire a certain materiality. Each country aspired to a literary canon, much in the way that it desired a flag, an army, a bureaucracy, and a legal system. But literature was somehow different from the rest. Unlike the other accouterments of the nation, literature had by definition no function. This seemingly paradoxical situation shows the unsung powers of culture, namely that an unserviceable body of texts came to be recognized as an essential feature of the new political reality – the nation-state. A non-utilitarian mode of textuality acquired the effect of utility.

Readers began to recognize the boundaries and characteristics of this new entity. It was there, a discursive formation, supported by the education system from the primary to the post-secondary level, the press, the publishing business, bookstores, and a host of readers. They have accepted this reality for over 200 years. Indeed, at the universities

of many countries, literary departments are still organized along the boundaries of national literature. So we have departments of French, German, and English literatures. It is ironic that, with all the talk about globalization, these departments still stand. It is doubly ironic that Comparative Literature, the discipline that arose in the latter nineteenth century to compensate for the compartmentalization of literary studies, is in crisis, while these departments prevail. Indeed, there have been many accounts in the last ten years mourning the demise of Comparative Literature. And World Literature has risen in its place, with the intent of making up for the deficiencies of its predecessor (Jusdanis 2003; Spivak 2003).[2]

This only goes to show how tenacious the hold of the idea of national literature has been. What makes this grip perplexing is that literature has not been national in the way that nationalist ideology would have hoped – if by that we mean that literature underwrote nationalist identity or that it mirrored the face of the nation. Literature may indeed have been used in the press or in the schools to maintain and promote a nationalist ideology among readers or pupils. But the majority of literary texts never embraced this political agenda. Indeed, these texts actually showed a nation divided, insecure, and pulled in opposite directions.

Let me provide some examples from Greece. Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857) is now hailed as the national bard of Greece. Indeed, his "Ode to Liberty" has been designated as the national anthem. His oeuvre is now hailed as supremely Greek, expressing the soul of the nation. But what seems now for Greek readers the most representative national text was originally a contradictory project patched together loosely by a poet of divided national and linguistic loyalties. For instance, Solomos was born on the Ionian island of Zakynthos, then a Venetian possession soon to be acquired by Great Britain. His mother tongue was Italian rather than Greek. Indeed, he spent ten years studying in Italy and when he returned to his home he had to relearn Greek almost as a foreign language. His first verses were written in Italian and translated into the national language of his country. And his great works, such as the ethereal poem "Free and Besieged," is suffused with German idealist philosophy made to speak demotic Greek in ballad form. The poem, however, is a failure in that it is fragmentary: Solomos, romantic poet that he was, could never complete and give it the ideal aesthetic form he desired. Nevertheless, we have to consider it national not only because of the weight of history, but also because it is written in the Greek language and indeed came to define Greek literary idiom in the way Dante is said to have done with Italian or Goethe with German.

We see a similar process at work in the canonization of Georgios Vizyenos (1849–96), now regarded, along with Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851–1911), as the father of the Greek short story. Indeed, the Greek short story as a literary genre goes back to these two authors.[3] But to what extent is Vizyenos's masterpiece "Moscóv-Selím" national? To start, its protagonist is not Greek at all, something the author himself recognizes in the preamble to the story, which he separates from the actual narration and addresses directly in the second person to the protagonist himself, Moscóv-Selím. The speaker confesses that he regrets having met him, because Moscóv-Selím has given the author "grief to drink" and "his doleful, trembling voice echoes plaintively in" his ear. But note the alarm he feels about national misunderstandings:

> I don't doubt that the fanatics of your race will curse the memory of a "believer" because he opened the sanctuary of his heart to the unholy eyes of an infidel. I fear that the fanatics of my own race[4] will reproach a Greek author because he did not conceal your virtue, or did not substitute a Christian hero in his account.
>
> (Vizyenos 1988: 187)

He, the Greek author, inaugurating the short story as literary genre, chose a Muslim as his protagonist. Yet he fears that members of the two respective communities will castigate the Muslim and the Christian for entering into a bond of friendship.

Who was Moscóv-Selím? And why did the author write a story about him that could have had a hostile reception among his Greek readership? He is a fascinating case of someone who tramples the boundaries of gender, religion, and ethnicity. Born to an aristocratic Muslim family in Istanbul in the early nineteenth century, Moscóv-Selím is kept in the harem by his mother until his adolescence, an experience that heightens his sense of empathy for people different than him. Although as a young man he fights valiantly for the sultan in Bosnia-Herzegovina and later the Crimean War, he is never recognized by his father and is mistreated by the state. Finally, a prisoner of war in Russia, he receives comfort and support from a Russian family with whom he is billeted. Indeed, this is one of the first times he is treated kindly by anybody other than by his mother and wife. As a result, he comes to identify culturally with his Russian hosts and, when he returns to the Ottoman territories, dresses and acts like a Russian, hence the double name, Moscóv-Selím, which expresses his tug-of-war identity. In short, he hardly constitutes

the type of national character one would expect in the foundational text to a literary genre of the new institution of literature. He not only is an enemy of the nation, but also exhibits signs of someone who transcends the borders of any nation, wishing to identify with neither. Indeed, the character of Moscóv-Selím exists for no other reason than to undermine the very idea of a fixed national identity, of love for the nation, of racial ontology. He is post-national before the birth of that term.

We find this also in Constantine Cavafy, probably the most famous Greek poet and one of the most celebrated of the twentieth century. To most readers outside Greece, he seems to represent modern Greek literature. But to contemporaneous Greeks, Cavafy seemed neither Greek nor his poems literary. For example, Cavafy spent most of his time in Alexandria and considered himself a member of the diaspora rather than a Greek citizen. His seemed pedestrian to mainland and mainstream readers, who were accustomed to flowery, national verses. Overall, his subject matter was also disturbing to these readers, as Cavafy chose unpopular themes. Rather than referring to the glories of ancient Greece, for instance, he wrote about epochs of decline, such as the Hellenistic period, the time of late antiquity, and of the Byzantine Empire. The individuals populating the poems set in antiquity were not "biologically" Greek, but actually boasted of their racial mixing. Furthermore, he spoke frankly of homosexual love. Finally and most scandalously, rather than writing in the demotic, the national language, he broke ranks with critics and poets in Greece by employing the more learned register (Katharevousa) alongside more ancient forms of the Greek language. So in reading Cavafy, readers found themselves riding in a train bearing the entire Greek linguistic tradition.

In all three cases, the authors are national and international at the same time. Or rather, they are national because they are transnational. It can't be otherwise. All three devour external sources, but, as the Brazilian critic Haroldo de Campos notes, without submitting to them, but rather by appropriating them and giving them a different value and direction (2007: 160).[5] They exemplify the tension writers have always found themselves in between the individual and the universal. We can say this of other traditions. Let us look at three classic American novels of the nineteenth century. While Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* deals with the American experience, it expresses it in the idiom of a poor white boy and a runaway slave rather than in standard English. At the same time, it subjects the institution of slavery to criticism for its inhumanity. So does Harriet Beecher Stowe's astonishingly popular novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that many people credit with

having contributed to the anti-slave movement. Herman Melville's masterpiece *Moby Dick* begins in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and takes place on an American whaling ship manned mostly by American sailors. But this novel contains the whole world within itself, departing from the American experience, yet not being possible without it. It is national because its ambitions were transnational.

What we have then, to cite de Campos again, is not an ontological nationalism but a differential one, a dialogic movement from inside to outside and vice versa. This interchange gives national literature its paradoxical nature, in that it is "there" and "not there" at the same time. It exists as a collection of texts bound to a particular nation, but it is not representative of that nation, not in the way that nation believes. This is why we can say that national literature has had a social effect without itself necessarily containing a material reality, the useless being put to utilitarian purposes.

*   *   *

If national literature, like the two twin concepts it comprises – nationalism and literature – is a nineteenth-century concept, what future does it have today in the fluid world of the Internet? Have we arrived at a post-national, post-literary universe? This is a profound question that obviously can have no definitive answer. Indeed, any answer will have to be very speculative. But at the moment I would like to say, probably not. But before traveling into the future, let me turn to the past. To understand whether the nation-state could survive, we should try to grasp what it offered its adherents in the first place.

Why did people latch on to the doctrine of nationalism? Why did people begin to live in nation-states and why do they continue to do so? In the past, we were not able to consider these questions because of our automatic reflex to denounce the evils of nationalism and to gloat over its failures. But in my research, I discovered that nationalism, rather than being a slide into an antediluvian hell, actually represented a step toward a brighter future. I came to see nationalism as a product of modernity that encouraged people to step into the new and threatening realm of modernization. It was part of the eternal give and take between the individual and the universal, the present and the tradition, the local and globalization that has always characterized human societies. Nationalism represents a modern interpretation of this ancient dialectic.

And what message does this dynamic announce to people? It assured them that they could step into the weird and frightening world of

modernity, knowing that their inherited ways of life would be shielded from disappearance. Partha Chaterjee rightly argues that in a colonial situation, people divide their life less into the private and the public than into the spiritual and the material. While people grant to the colonial power superiority in the instrumental realm (trade, armaments, bureaucracy, goods), they carve out the realm of indigenous identities over which they stake their sovereignty. The colonial power, in other words, is kept out of this domain, which serves as a unifying force before and after independence (Chatterjee 1986, 1993).

Nationalism isolated culture for attention, culture both in its anthropological permutation as way of life and aesthetic signification as art. It granted this domain a material force by using it both as a stepping stone toward modernization and as an explanation for social change. Unlike either liberal or Marxist theory, nationalism understood that people value their sense of belonging, their membership in cultural communities. It thus promised them that, in the swirl of globalization, it would protect their nation from extinction. In so doing, nationalism made the concept of cultural uniqueness its own raison d'être in a very circular way: its rationale for existence was the singularity of the nation and, in order to continue, it had to defend this uniqueness. This was the self-referential logic of nationalism – infuriating and liberating at the same time. In short, the history of nationalism has taught us that life has a cultural component and politics concerns both power and meaning (Poole 1999: 113). We have ignored this truth only because we have continued to see culture as a secondary agent in social change, a derivative force, responding to transformations around it but never being able to generate change itself.

The nation-state, however, offers more than cultural signification – it promises sovereignty. In modernity, statehood is the only condition of self-rule. Social welfare, political representation, self-government are experienced within its borders. In short, for the last two centuries people have experienced citizenship within states. This is why we have the double epithet of nation-state, yoking culture and politics, software and hardware. The state then not only protects tradition, but also promises its citizens freedom from foreign occupation and the possibility of self-rule – both independence and sovereignty. (That this is not always borne out is not a reason to blame the nation itself.)

Nationalism, as David Miller points out, posited three interrelated propositions that are still valid today. First, it offered a personal connection for citizens to an abstract structure by which they could tie their own individual selves to the transcendent national self. Second,

it represented nations as ethical communities, which meant that the duties we owe to fellow citizens are different from those owed to other human beings. Finally, it contended that people who form a national community on a particular territory have a strong claim to political self-determination (2000: 27). Of course, all these propositions are now up in the air, scattered in cyberspace. It would be foolish and arrogant to pretend that the conditions ushering in nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries obtain today. With some justification, commentators have for the last 20 years predicted the disappearance of the nation-state. Economic, political, and technological forces are buffeting this structure from outside and causing it to disintegrate from the inside. They chip away at its authority and power and recreate it in different global arrangements. It is a process of disassembling and reassembling (Sassen 2011: 457). The undoing of the nation-state may be happening before our very eyes – in the European Union, especially those countries in the Euro zone. The economic crisis of recent years, especially the monetary exigencies, is pushing these countries to abandon more sovereignty to non-elected officials in Brussels and Frankfurt. We may be seeing the gradual creation of a postmodern version of the Holy Roman Empire (which some may see as an unholy German empire). Whether a European cultural identity comes about as a result of the federalization of Euro-Europe is open to question, as such as outcome would necessitate the suppression of individual national identities. Indeed, the economic crisis seems to have weakened people's identification with European institutions. But this does not seem to stop the gradual formation of closer state-like structures.[6]

In one respect, the loss of sovereignty may be a good thing insofar as it leads to a certain political, moral, and cultural cosmopolitanism. A weak global civil society may be forming as we speak, a vibrant non-governmental system of interconnected socioeconomic institutions that straddle the earth with the aim of drawing it closer together, of pluralizing power, and of problematizing violence.[7] This is made up of institutions like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the Red Cross, al Jazeera, and figures like Bono, Bill Gates, Desmond Tutu, all contributing to the creation of an interconnected, non-governmental space (Keane 2003: xi). Global civil society is an autonomous social space within which individuals and groups can organize on a world scale to transform power relations (Keane 2003: 62). This type of society may be yielding a new type of transnational emotional connection – what Jeremy Rifkin has called a global empathic consciousness. Basing his theory on Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which investigated the unifying potential of

human feelings and emotions, Rifkin believes that empathy is the means by which we transcend ourselves by exploring our relations with each other beyond those of the nation-state, with what he calls the "awe of being" (2009: 169). At the basis of his argument is a paradox: the more globally connected we become, the more fossil fuels we expend (such as the fuel participants used to come to Istanbul for the conference that inspired the present anthology) in order to achieve this empathic sensitivity. The challenge before us then is the following: Can we extend this moral and social interconnectedness to avert planetary collapse (Rifkin 2009: 2)?

But in order to prevent this physical perdition, do we risk sinking in a sea of homogenization?[8] For globalization favors diversity of taste on an individual level but uniformity on a global level. When one cultural product travels from one society to another, heterogeneity within that society goes up but declines globally, in that both societies now begin to resemble each other (Cowen 2002: 15). That is to say, while individuals within each society now have greater access to foreign products, on a global level they are locked into a uniformity of taste. Thus, when Starbucks opens a shop in Istanbul, some of us may mourn the spread of American taste, but people in Istanbul now have greater possibilities to meet and have coffee.[9]

Will these trends lead to the death of nation-states? Yes and no, as we saw in the case of the European Union. This give and take has always been a feature of human history. The spread of humans from Africa all the way to New Zealand was one example of global flows. So was the formation of languages. The Persian Empire mixed cultures all over the Near East and its imperialism was resisted by the Greeks.[10] Alexander of Macedon adopted Hellenism, for him a foreign culture, and took it all the way to Afghanistan. Of course, people can point to the Web of today. But before the Internet was the telephone and before that the telegraph – technologies that brought people together who were physically removed from each other. And the letter, whether written on clay tablets, vellum, or papyrus, diminished distances between sender and receiver. To be sure, today's technologies permit the instantaneousness not known before. And capitalism is a form of economic exchange without precedent. They are unique to our global system, bringing about creativity and destruction. But this uniqueness should not blind us to the reality that economic and cultural exchange has been a feature of human society.

Of course, in the push and pull of globalization, nations have disappeared. The history of humanity is littered with lost groups. Individual

cultures may indeed die, while others emerge. Let us not forget that today's ethnic groups are nothing other than yesterday's syncretic mixtures. This has always been the case, destruction and recreation. The more people are confronted by the global imposition of values and practices, the more they resist and embrace local ways of life. The Napoleonic invasions of Europe provide an illustrative example. Napoleon, not unlike the United States today, wanted to transport universal values, in his case, of the French Revolution, to the peoples of Europe, but was disenchanted to discover violent resistance on the way. Even the German intellectuals and poets, who had embraced the Revolution and striven to overthrow their own repressive regimes, turned against Napoleon's armies. German nationalism owes its birth to a certain extent to the French occupation of German territories.

What does this tell us? Two things. First, people do not want freedom, democracy, fraternity, and peace shoved down their throats, whether in the Berlin of 1806 or the Baghdad of 2003. Second, they put value on their cultural identities, be they ethnic, national, racial, religious, class, or a mixture of the above. People maintain these identities, even fight for them, because identity provides not only a sense of belonging, but also a cognitive, emotional, and intellectual entree into the world around them. Identity provides motivation, agency (Poole 1999: 61). Autonomy, a valuable commodity of modernity, has a political, economic, and cultural component. Social life has always had a cultural dimension. People have valued and will continue to value their own unique way of life, even more so when this way of life confronts others. So, even though we can conceive of a future without nation-states, I find it hard to imagine the evaporation of cultural identities. We humans are much too conditioned and attached to local cultures to give them up.[11]

This is also my position with respect to literature. I have pointed out that our understanding of literature is a modern cultural and social construct. But this does not mean that people did not compose creative texts before the eighteenth century. The institution of national literature was formed in western Europe in the more general process of the amalgamation of the arts. It was part of the nationalization of the aesthetic, a companion to the erection of national museums, of opera houses, concert halls, libraries, and galleries. Literature, as an institution containing poetry, the novel, and drama, became grouped as part of the new system of the arts. At the same time, it also became a national property. But the nationalization of literature or what sociologists call its functional differentiation, that is, the social compartmentalization of reading and writing, should not blind us to the fact that people

have always preoccupied themselves with narrative, as they have with aesthetic products – be this listening to ballads, looking at sculpture, or admiring dance. There is a constancy to this. Obviously, it is the meaning that we attach to this practice that changes from time to time. National literature is the modern manifestation of the human preoccupation with narrative.

So in order to consider the possible disappearance of literature, we have to reflect, as we did in the case of nationality, on its meaning. How was it understood and used? Of course, this was the paradox of modern literature in that it eschewed any instrumental value. Yet it did have a function. I have argued that fundamental to the workings of literature is the line it draws between fiction and reality. When we read a literary text, we are conscious of entering another, invented world. We enjoy dealing with simulations, something Aristotle had pointed out. Literature guards this border between the two. I have called this guardianship the parabatic potential of literature, borrowing the term "parabasis" from that part of Aristophanic comedy when members of the chorus step forward, remove their masks, and address the audience as real citizens rather than as actors on the stage. In the parabasis, we wonder what is represented and what it is not (Jusdanis 2001). This double function of the chorus as actors and as social critics mirrors the dual capacity of literature to provide entertainment and social purpose. Literature then provides the possibility of an invented world. At the same time, from the perch afforded by this world, we gaze back at our empirical universe, compare it, criticize it, see alternatives, and seek to change it. Our appreciation of the literary text is both aesthetic/emotional and political/social. The parabatic potential of literature illuminates the boundary that separates the actual from the world of illusions.

The border between invention and reality is fundamental to the human species and thus will always be with us as long as we exist. It has had different manifestations in the history of humanity, literature being one of them. But is there a future for national literature itself? About this I am not so sure. I began by arguing that literature is a historical formation, the creation of the age of print and of nationalism. So what can its future be in the new liquid, ever expansive world of the Internet? If literature was created by the economy of producers, what can its future be in the galaxy of networkers?[12] In one respect, the formation of social links is hardly new. For networks, defined as interconnected communicative structures formed around specific goals, are constitutive of human life (Castells 2009: 21). Society has always been networked, as it has always been global. What is different today is the intensity and

saturation power of the network, both as reality and metaphor. And networking constitutes the new organizing impulse of society. The diffusion of this logic affects processes of production, personal experience, power, and culture.[13] If communication is the sharing of meaning through the exchange of information, then communication takes place today with vertigo-inducing speed and strength.[14]

Is there time in the network for anyone to read the novel? Will the novel go the way of lyric poetry, as a preoccupation of specialists?[15] Again, I have no way of projecting into the future. I do know that each technology has yielded its own type of aesthetic forms. And the novel was a product of a particular technology and society. Yet it spread throughout the world, away from its original milieu. But it has always been associated with print, in the same way that oral poetry has been produced by societies without alphabets. Vases were crafted in ancient communities, pyramids were built in Egypt, and manuscripts were decorated by medieval monks. I suspect that the electronic mediums of communication will yield their own unique forms of art. We have already seen the appearance and disappearance of the hypertext story. Recently, I read a collection of short stories, each of about 420 characters, that had appeared originally on Facebook (Beach 2011). Yet, we have not so far seen the novel equivalent of Wikipedia, an online document referring to other texts and other media in infinite ways. If someone were to create such a text, would it still be a novel? Can the novel escape the gravity of print and still be what it was, a text for private and silent reading?[16]

But we should also bear in mind that technological innovation, like aesthetic creation, is not a teleological endgame. On the one hand, no one sends telegrams any longer. But on the other, television has not eradicated radio. Indeed, the latter continues to thrive in the age of the Internet. The telephone has become even more dominant today, following us wherever we go, having become more central perhaps than the computer. In the same way, poetry has never been really supplanted by subsequent aesthetic forms. People continue to compose dramas and satires. And they may keep on writing and reading novels. These phenomena should make us eschew the apocalyptic predictions about the disappearance of either the nation or literature. Nothing seems more naïve and grandiosely false than the Enlightenment prophecy about the gradual secularization of the world. This seems so wrong, whether we stand in Istanbul, Bogota, or Chicago.

We are, as many evolutionary theorists have made clear, storytelling animals. We developed the capacity to tell and enjoy hearing/narrative

as an adaptive device. While people may argue about the reason for this talent, we can all agree that it is a universal quality in human beings. Over the millennia, people have perfected and given aesthetic form to this capacity for narrative, one of the most recent and most prominent being the novel. So the issue has never been the disappearance of narrative in general but only one modern instantiation of this – the novel.[17]

If I may look into lens of the future, I will be certain of two things: The continued centrality of cultural identities and of the parabatic purpose of literature. So while we may no longer work in departments of national literature, we will bear the cultural stamp of our group and delight in invented writing.

Notes

1. Thomas Paine provides the perfect example in the American context, which in itself offers one of the earliest illustrations of nationalism, even if this did not wish to ally itself with the European type of nation-building. Paine promoted his ideas for rebellion against the British Crown through pamphlets.
2. If the literature departments themselves are in trouble, at least in North America, it is because of dwindling undergraduate enrollments. It may be difficult for a university today, facing the politics of austerity, to justify one department for German and another for an entire continent such as Asia. And students themselves may be less interested in learning German or French, preferring Spanish, Arabic, or Chinese, for obvious reasons.
3. Vizyenos himself was born in the territory of the Ottoman Empire and spent his formative years in Istanbul, before continuing his studies in Göttingen.
4. It is interesting that he refers here to race, *phyli*, rather than *ethnos* (nation). The usage of this word suggests these terms were still interchangeable.
5. de Campos cites Oswald de Andrade's notion of "anthropophagy" in which he describes the dialectic between the individual and universal as the local devouring the global cultural heritage, like a cannibal (de Andrade in de Campos 2007: 159).
6. See here Chris Shore (2000). At the same time, the crisis is fomenting more nationalist feeling. Ethnic stereotypes are reemerging to explain economic success or failure. So we have the moralizing Teutonic little red hens, who gloat about their *Fleiß*, and the indolent Hellenic cicadas, idling on the beach as the summer passes. Many Europeans are withdrawing within their own borders, not wishing to take responsibility for the whole of Europe. There seems to be a push for federalization among elites and the reassuring search for *Heimat* among others.
7. On the decline in violence, see Pinker (2011).
8. The gargantuan power of the global economy plays havoc with individual nations because it thrives beyond the regulatory umbrella of the nation-state, even of such huge entities as the United States, China, and the European Union. So much of the economy today is effectively

denationalized. What does sovereignty mean today for a country like Greece or even Canada? It would be wrong, however, to define the nation-state and the global economy as mutually exclusive. The state has been a key agent in the implementation of global processes (Sassen 1996: 26).

9. I have often discovered that while cosmopolitans deplore the proliferation of Starbucks, the locals, whether in Quito or in Zanesville, Ohio, celebrate the broadening of possibilities.
10. On the earliest empires, see Algaze (2001).
11. I argue this more fully in *The Necessary Nation* (2001).
12. I borrow these terms from Zygmunt Bauman (2007: 14, 53).
13. Castells (1996: 469, 2009: 54). Although the Internet is a global phenomenon, the interaction people have with it differs from place to place (Farivar 2011).
14. This networking logic informs the global economy, whose raw material seems to be information itself. What distinguishes our current technological revolution is less the centrality of knowledge and information, than the application of such knowledge to the generation of knowledge in a cumulative feedback between innovation and uses of innovation (Castells 1996: 32). On the inequalities of the new capitalism, see Miller (2007), Sennett (2006), and Klein (2007).
15. See here David Orr's *Beautiful and Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry* (2011).
16. I have considered these questions in Jusdanis (2010). See Punday (2012).
17. This is what Jonathan Gottschall (2012) does not understand in his breezy examination of the power of stories.

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Part I

2
Writing the Future in Early Turkish Republican Literature

Azade Seyhan

> J'appartiens a une nation qui . . . a recommencé le parcours de toute son histoire et qui, dans les décombres, se prépare tranquillement, sûrement, á en refair une autre et á courir sa chance dans un jeu oú elle part sans atouts.
>
> (I belong to a nation which . . . has begun to relive the course of her entire history and which is calmly and surely preparing out of the ruins to make another history and to take her chance in a game where she holds no trumps). Albert Camus, Lettres à un ami allemande [Letters to a German Friend]
>
> (1965: 225)

In a series of four epistolary essays addressed to the German nation in 1945, when the German armies, after having laid the European continent waste, were themselves laid waste, Albert Camus expresses a sentiment that echoes the anticipatory hope of early Turkish republican writers. Halide Edib Adıvar (1884–1964), Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889–1974), and Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889–1956) took up the pen amidst the ruins of the occupied Ottoman Empire to fortify the will and courage of the nationalist forces gearing up to push back the enemy. Holding day jobs as teachers, journalists, and civil servants, these writers saw education and educational reform as the only panacea for the new Turkish republic at the time of its birth and with the onset of growing pains. The not unjustified anti-nationalist rhetoric of contemporary Turkish celebrity novelists, such as Orhan Pamuk and Elif Şafak (e.g. Pamuk's *Snow* (2004), Şafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* [2007]), has led to a certain neglect of the work of early republican writers, who were the intellectual architects of the young nation. While their work has lost its former resonance in critical discourse on modern Turkish literature

and literary history, viewed in historical context and in terms of literary appeal and social insight this oeuvre has proven to be both prescient and rigorously discerning of the trials of Turkish modernity (Seyhan 2008: 77–8).

The radical and dehistoricized critique of Turkish nationalism by factions of the intelligentsia from both right and left has emboldened the Islamist government to the point of repudiating the legitimacy of the Turkish republic.[1] The attack on the foundational principles of the republic has provoked the ire of its living architects and their supporters. In an open letter of August 25, 2012, to the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the then 98-year-old world-renowned archaeologist and professor Muazzez İlmiye Çığ challenged his claim that the ruling party AKP (Justice and Development Party) had fortified the country and the economy with a *demir ağ* (an iron web). She reminded the Islamist government that the republic and her teachers and peers had overcome insurmountable obstacles to educate a generation that was to be the foundation of the new nation. Her final words point to the irreducible ideological distance between the progressive and secularist generation and the Islamist mentality nourished and enhanced by a rhetoric of suspicion and accusation directed at the much maligned "nationalists," and financed by big money. Çığ's parting words to Erdoğan are:

> Bundan sonra İmam Hatiplerde yetiştireceğiniz dindar ve kindar o zavallı gençleriniz, Allah'a dua ederek, yalvararak size yardımcı olurlar. Böylece elinize aldığınız bu güzel ülkeyi kendinizle toprağa gömerek tarihe kara harflerle geçersiniz.

> (Those poor religious and revengeful young people whom you'll be educating in *İmam Hatip* schools [religious institutions of secondary education] will from now on help you by praying to and pleading with God. And in this way, you'll bury yourself with this beautiful country you have seized and have your name printed in history in black letters).
>
> <div align="right">(Çığ quoted in Baytaş, Sözcü October 7, 2012, this and
all following translations from Turkish texts are mine)</div>

One of the most prescient moments in Karaosmanoğlu's gripping political novel *Hüküm Gecesi* (Night of Judgment, 2011 [1927]) foreshadows Çığ's darkly courageous words. The protagonist Ahmet Kerim, a young journalist, caught in the bloody maelstrom of the age of *İkinci Meşrutiyet* (Second Constitutional Era, 1908–18) writes for the opposition under the *İttihat ve Terakki* (Unity and Progress Party) regime. Betrayed by a

confidante, he is imprisoned during a political witch hunt. "Man, we were already condemned, the moment we were born!" he sighs, as he awaits a certain death in a dark cell (2011: 298). Here Karaosmanoğlu's narrator steps in to reflect on the trials of a lost generation whose history is now relived by Erdoğan's "poor religious and revengeful young people":

> This orphaned Turkish youth, deprived of even the most primitive form of culture and the simplest ideal, which has to find its own path in the darkness, conflicts, deceptions, and hatred of the age, appeared to Ahmet Kerim as the most pained, the most wronged, and the most despondent face of humanity.
>
> (2011: 298–9)

A difficult algorithm: Negotiating tradition and nation

The complicated fortunes of a culture, which took a civilizational quantum leap from theocratic monarchy to secular republic and became unmoored from the cultural continuum that was a guarantor of its identity, form a focal point of the novels of the early republican period. The major novelists of this era, Adıvar, Karaosmanoğlu, and Güntekin, were products of Ottoman-Islamic culture, whose legacy nurtured their art. At the same time, they understood that the cultural and aesthetic pull of Islam not only failed to support the social, political, and scientific imperatives of the new nation, but also blocked its modernization agenda at key junctures. However, they were not unreflecting apologists of a nationalist ethos or secularist ideology. They had to find their way to a reconciliation of conflicting loyalties, to a state of communal or national solidarity amidst the devastation of two wars and to prepare, as Camus envisioned, "out of the ruins to make another history," to take their chance in a game in which they held no trumps (Camus op.cit).

The sentiments contained in Professor Çığ's words and the contents of her letter, which lists the selfless work of her contemporaries in building the nation without foreign aid and capitulation to imperialist powers, echo the narrative tenor of the novels of the early republican era, whose authors saw their task as laying an educational foundation for the nation, a concept for which there was no word in the Ottoman Empire. While the map of the land was marked by a multitude of different ethnic and religious communities, the sum of these did not amount to a nation. The concept of nationalism came into the consciousness of

the Ottoman state only when its subject *millet*s (or peoples constituting the separate religious communities) seceded from the empire after the victorious outcome of their nationalist struggles. The idea of national affiliation and unity superseded that of religious community at a much later date, but remained effectively entangled with it.

In "The Turkish Option in Comparative Perspective" (1997), Ernest Gellner, by his own admission not an expert on the Turkish polity, explicates the phenomenon of Turkish nationalism in the parable of a mismatched groom and bride, respectively representing political and cultural nationalism. While historical paths to the union of nation and culture in Europe have branched with regard to time zones and the relationship of the groom (political) and the bride (high culture), in the Islamic world a different scenario unfolds. In the transition from agricultural society to modern one, in which agriculture is one occupation among many in a network of social dependencies[2] that foster economic growth, a unifying concept of attachment becomes necessary. In Europe, this imperative of affiliation emerges as nationalism, and in the Islamic world as fundamentalism: while high culture in Europe has largely been divorced from religious dogma, in Islam, religion and high culture have remained intimately connected. The Turkish case was a further deviation from the Islamic one. In the late Ottoman era, the groom, groomed to be a political entity, was just an elite cadre that spoke Turkish, somewhat identified with Islam and had no interest in Anatolian peasantry as a potential bride. However, since Islam was identified with the discredited *ancien régime*, the only available cultural-ethnic bride was the Anatolian peasantry, which understood this arranged marriage as a religious rather than a political union.

In "Islamism and Nationalism as Sister Ideologies: Reflections on the Politicization of Islam in a Longue Durée Perspective" (2009), Elisabeth Özdalga implicitly takes up the question that Gellner only approaches metaphorically, that is, the disjunction between political and cultural nationalism or the absence of their social differentiation in the Islamic world. She illustrates through examples from Islamic history and contemporary Islamic regimes, specifically Iran, how the nation-state is "cast in an authoritarian, dictatorial form and wrapped in Islamic garb" (2009: 411).[3] In general terms, Özdalga's argument rests on the thesis that Islamic societies, where political constituency is understood as *umma*, the community of Muslims, nationalism is, in essence, coterminous with the caliphate, or in her words, "there is a striking affinity between the idioms of nationalism and those of the Islamic caliphate" (Ibid: 416).

As various regional interpretations of the Islamic legacy, which have become the modern forms of *hadith*, compete in the formation of national identities in Islam, fundamentalist factions and sects, backed by mega-dollars, have emerged as ruling ideologies that dominate the national institutions of the Turkish state today. Interestingly, the most powerful and richly resourced *umma*, the community of the Islamic revivalist Fethullah Gülen, initially acquired legitimacy in the works of intellectuals and academics who laid the burden of guilt for Turkey's mismanaged modernity on the *Türk Devrimi* (the Turkish Revolution) and the republican reforms that they saw as responsible for the cultural rupture in Ottoman Turkish life. While Özdalga at the time of her writing correctly observed that the Gülen movement was seen as a representation of Turkey's unique mission as a Muslim state that has succeeded in building both a prosperous economy and a stable democracy, today the news and commentaries that circulate through the Internet, list serves, and social networks tell a different story, as in the example of Professor Çığ's letter, which is reproduced on numerous blogs and online newspapers.

One of the useful contributions of technology to books is the availability of reader comments on web pages of publishers and bookstores and in blogs. Even a cursory glance at these pages reveals the overwhelming appreciation that readers from many walks of life have for the works of the early republican novelists. Although close to a century has passed since the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish War of Independence, the works of writers who witnessed the momentous transitions of their era are widely read and recommended to other readers, despite the emergence of considerable talent in the contemporary Turkish literary scene. Some of these readers clearly share Professor Çığ's nostalgia for an age when the young republic self-identified as a secular progressive state that resisted imperialist intervention and financial backing for divisive ideologies. The Islamicization of the higher educational system may remove books such as Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *Yaban* (The Alien, 1977 [1932]) and Reşat Nuri Güntekin's *Yeşil Gece* (The Green Night, 2002 [1928]) that remind us of the dark side of Islam and an age right out of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Today, when books are censored or are no longer in print, they survive on various scales of digital translation and have an afterlife, or *Nachleben* in the words of Walter Benjamin, through reader reception on the Web and in social media.

The enduring appeal of the early republican writers, and especially Karaosmanoğlu, lies in their prescience in understanding the impossible calculus of making a quantum leap from a century-long theocratic

Islamic empire to a modern secular age, accompanied by overnight top-down reforms, the most radical of which was arguably alphabet reform. This civilizational leap also transplanted Islamic law, calendar, garb, and measurements into Western cultural soil. It unmoored the Ottoman Turk from the cultural continuum that was a guarantor of identity. This separation anxiety emerges as a melancholy overlay in the novels of the republican era. The tension between religion and modern statehood is arguably most sharply delineated in Karaosmanoğlu's oeuvre, which offers, in symbolic register and historical detail, the trials of Turkish modernity from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth.

Karaosmanoğlu's most famous novel *Yaban* (1977 [1932]) throws into sharp relief the endlessly referenced abyss between the Turkish elite cadre of teachers, scholars, army officers, and lawyers, who were secular, educated, Western oriented, and the Anatolian peasantry steeped in ignorance, superstition, and a religious fanaticism that bears little resemblance to any idea of tolerant Islam. Today the confrontation is between secular intellectuals, incorruptible civil servants, a middle class desiring a better life through honest work and Islamists, both intellectual and uneducated, nouveau riche and poor. *Yaban*'s protagonist is an officer, Ahmet Celâl, who was wounded in World War I and had retired to a small Anatolian village with his former orderly Mehmet Ali at the time the nationalist guerilla forces were gearing up in Anatolia for an offensive against occupying enemy armies. *Yaban* is a frame narrative, a journal kept by Ahmet Celâl, who because of his deep mistrust of the milieu to which he once belonged has sought refuge in this hinterland, with tragic consequences. He witnesses the hopeless conditions under which the nationalist forces fight and records these in detail. The soldiers of the national front and the chronicler/diarist alike suffer the consequences of an ill-fated and unrequited love, the love for their own people. Ahmet Celâl is treated as an outsider and shunned by the villagers, who also abet the invading Greek armies in their battle with the nationalist forces.

Although *Yaban* represents a culturally specific period in the form of a diary with a thesis, it has been received in the Western press as the first Turkish novel that achieved the status of the tragic. Both the protagonist and the villagers, who never accept him because of his education and higher standing, are victims of forces they have no control over. Karaosmanoğlu underscores the universal relevance of the human tragedy of war and deracination by allusions to major works of the Western literary tradition, ranging from the *Odyssey* and the Bible to Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow's stories. Because *Yaban* represents a political mood shift in the decade after the founding of the young Turkish nation, it offers significant critical insight into the conditions and limits of forging national consciousness. In light of the ever-deepening distrust between secular and fundamentalist forces in Islamic countries, Karaosmanoğlu's early representation of the cultural divide in Turkish society has proven alarmingly prescient. However, it is not the content of the story that still resonates with the reader, who has heard this tale many times – the fundamentalist locked in eternal battle with the nationalist-secularist – but the tragic elements, the inevitable catastrophic conclusion brought about by the human limitations of the protagonist, suffering that seems disproportionate to culpability, and the inexplicable sorrow weighing on man and nature. The tragic resonates with poetic pathos and lends the novel its worldly and transnational cast. At the same time, the elements of the tragic that transpired prior to their narration in the journal/novel are projected forward and allegorize the future shocks to the fragile Turkish nation.

Halide Edib Adıvar's *Vurun Kahpeye* (Beat the Bitch, 2006 [1926]) narrates in harrowing detail the similar tragedy of an idealistic teacher, who asks to be assigned to a school in a desolate village. Aliye, an orphan who had at a young age lost her father to war and her mother to illness, vows to become mother to the nation's "orphaned children." She swears by God that she will be the guiding light and mother to the children of the village and fear nothing in her fight to educate them. She also tries to instill a nascent nationalism in the children, teaches them marching songs, and sets an example by sacrificing herself to help the advance of the Turkish national army. In this quest, she is lynched by the powerful and fanatical religious heads of the village, who, like the villagers in Karaosmanoğlu's *Yaban*, side with the Greek occupiers. While Aliye closely resembles the idealistic teacher Feride of Güntekin's popular novel *Çalıkuşu* (The Wren, 1975 [1922]), also an orphan who goes into the Anatolian wasteland to educate children of villages beyond hope and is reviled by the conservative powers that rule them, she cuts a much more tragic figure than either Feride or Ahmet Cemâl. The visceral power of the scene where she is lynched by the fanatical arm of Islam is an uncanny foreshadowing of the execution by stoning of a young mother falsely accused of adultery in Cyrus Nowrasteh's explosive 2008 film *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, which was banned in Iran.

In one or more novels by Adıvar, Karaosmanoğlu, and Güntekin, the quest for education is often foiled by the inevitable resistance of historical reality, that is, by the superstition, ignorance, and poverty of

the masses. While Karaosmanoğlu and Güntekin read the vital signs of a fragile young Turkey with uncanny correctness and foresaw the inevitable clash of the religious and the secular, Adıvar believed in, or perhaps hoped for, a reconciliation of the Islamic faith with progressive education and a humanist paradigm. In *Vurun Kahpeye* there are two kinds of Muslims, the fanatic and the sublime, the murderer and the holy man. When Aliye listens to the unearthly beauty of the *mevlid* (religious memorial ritual) sung by a saintly old *Dede* (Alevi religious leader), she wonders how Hacı Fettah Efendi, the bogus and murderous Muslim, can conjure such nightmarish pain and torture from a religion of so much goodness and compassion (2006 [1926]: 60). Adıvar remained hopeful of the power of Islam to unite factions within its ranks. However, her unflinching depiction of Aliye's bloody and brutal execution forecloses the possibility of any harmony between the tyrannical and compassionate faces of Islam. Unlike Adıvar, Karaosmanoğlu and Güntekin were skeptical about a peaceful passage from the regime of Islam to an age of enlightened modernity. In *Tales of Crossed Destinies*, I read the story Güntekin's *Yeşil Gece* as a chronicle of a calamity foretold (2008: 74), for it envisions the return of the repressed, the brutal emergence of Islamic fanatics who had gone underground during Atatürk's systematic modernization reforms. Güntekin's story of the unstoppable threat of green armies charging toward "four corners of the world" (Ibid: 45) heralds the rise of fundamentalist religions in many parts of the globe and becomes the forerunner of today's critically acclaimed novels from the Muslim world about the brutalities of radical Islam. While writers such as Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, Tahar Djaout (killed by Islamic assassins) write in uncensored French in French exile and are uncompromising in their censure of Islamic fundamentalists, whose violence they had witnessed at one time or another, the works of Karaosmanoğlu and Güntekin speak alternately in a cautionary and corrective language and a tone of foreboding. At the same time, they do not flinch from depicting the clear and present danger of a politically compromised Islam.

All three early republican novelists were chroniclers of the dangers facing the young republic and depicted, in varying degrees, the betrayal of the new nation by Islamic clergy, landed gentry, and conservative forces and employed multiple genres in their work. Among the three, Karaosmanoğlu stands out as the writer of the *longue durée*, the one with the most acute insight into the ordeals of nation formation. Adıvar's novels are sensitized to the birth pangs of the republic and succeed in the historico-autobiographical category, as evidenced by *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928), first published in English. Her two novels of the Turkish War

of Independence, *Ateşten Gömlek* (Shirt of Fire, 1998 [1922]) and *Vurun Kahpeye* touched a chord in the generation that witnessed the war and the generations that followed. *Ateşten Gömlek* is a well-crafted example of the novelistic genre, clearly informed by Adıvar's sophisticated knowledge, as a professor of English, of world literatures. However, her craft is often compromised by melodrama and impossibly perfect heroines, the protagonists of almost all her novels, who are thinly veiled versions of herself. On the other hand, while Güntekin remains one of the most popular novelists among Turkish readers and many of his novels and plays have been filmed, made into TV series, and staged, and his deeply felt humanism has brought readers together in imagined communities, today's postmodern critics consider him a *démodé* realist. Adıvar's critical reception among academics within and outside Turkey currently rests much more on her status or the perception of her as a feminist writer than her gifts as a scholar of literature and history. Karaosmanoğlu, on the other hand, cannot be categorized. His enduring appeal derives from his visionary insight into the trials of Turkish modernity, his sense of the tragic as a novelist, and his language that strikes a happy medium between Ottoman and modern Turkish and gravity and irony.

Karaosmanoğlu's *Panorama*: A manifest destiny?

My decision to focus on Karaosmanoğlu's last novel in the final part of this chapter was inspired by a comment made by Robert Finn in his review of my *Tales of Crossed Destinies* (Finn 2010). In Finn's view, a major new exploration of Karaosmanoğlu's work would be an invaluable contribution to the study of the modern Turkish novel and modern Turkey.[4] A study of Karaosmanoğlu's exemplary oeuvre ranging from political columns, memoir, and travelogue to arguably the first major Turkish novel of international repute would require volumes. In the limited space of this analysis, I choose to focus on his last *tour de force*, *Panorama* (1971 [1. volume 1949; 2. volume 1952]), where the sociopolitical and aesthetic concerns of Karaosmanoğlu's long writing career lay the foundation for a truly epic, multigenerational novel that is at once the history of a young nation, plotted as tragedy, a political analysis presented as a kind of memoir, a book of ideas, and a foray into political philosophy.

The two-volume *Panorama*, running to over 500 pages, is, indeed, a breathtaking and shocking panorama of the steady decline of Enlightenment ideals of tolerance, freedom, and equality and the corruption of privilege barely a decade after Atatürk's death. It reads as

a "thesis" novel, for the shorter chapters, entitled *Hayat ve Mektuplar* (Life and Letters), inserted between the many plots and subplots of the novel pursue a sustained critique of Turkey's mismanaged modernization project. This highly erudite epistolary exchange of political and philosophical ideas takes place between the *Dış Ticaret Ofisi Müdürü* (Director of the Foreign Commerce Office), Cahit Halid (thinly disguised voice of Karaosmanoğlu), and Ahmet Nazmi, the philosophy and literature teacher at the Diyarbakır Lycée who later becomes a professor of philosophy. Although the letters are not contiguous with the storylines and may appear as gratuitous attachments to some, they form the conceptual frame of Karaosmanoğlu's thesis. This translates into the larger question: Why and how did the Enlightenment ideas of progress, freedom from religious authority, and normative humanism that Atatürk and his small visionary circle of acolytes had tried to instill in the national consciousness in the early triumphant years of the Republic fail so fast? Conventional wisdom has always attributed this failure to the abyss between the nationalists and the anti-nationalist, anti-secular Islamic forces. Using the discursive and intertextual latitude of the novel as a genre (as defined by the literary theorists of the *Frühromantik* [early German Romanticism]), Karaosmanoğlu offers an astute analysis of Immanuel Kant's *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (Kant 2001 [1784])) through a cast of characters of greatly diverging convictions, ideologies, religious beliefs, and levels of poverty and affluence. Kant's answer to the question was, "man's escape from his self-induced *Unmündigkeit* (juvenile state), which is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of the other" (2001: 135). While Atatürk ushered in an age – however fleeting – of enlightenment, the country was not to live in an enlightened age, as Kant referred to the Prussian state (Ibid: 140). Kant's essay provides the secular undertone of Karaosmanoğlu's novel, where masses gladly remain juvenile because of laziness, fear of independent thinking, and cowardice, thus making it "easy for others to usurp the role of guardians" (Ibid: 135). And once these guardians have put their "domestic animals" on a leash, they show them the dangers they will confront if they try to walk alone. Even though they could have learned to walk after a few falls, the threats shown prevent them from breaking away from the yoke of servitude.

In *Panorama*, however, those who have learned to walk fall, never to get up again. The idealist fighter *mebus* (representative to the National Assembly) Halil Remzi Bey is betrayed by a colleague and one-time comrade in ideals, Neşet Sabit. Hard working, poorly paid civil servants, who

put their life savings into cooperatives, are swindled by the contractor Sırrı Bey, who, in turn, is pushed into bankruptcy by the chair of the board of a major bank, Servet Bey. An idealist doctor in the provinces, a composite of the "unsung heroes" of the revolution, is framed when he wins a seat in the municipal elections. The anti-secularist Hacı Emin Efendi never leaves the house, once the fez is banned. Hiding behind his religious mask and bogus faith, he rapes an underage maid as his wife lies dying. One of his sons is an enlightened politician but obeys the patriarchal rule. The philosophy teacher and Fuat, the son of an honest civil servant who commits suicide after being fired from his job, become good friends and are killed by a group of *tekkeliler* (members of a religious lodge) whose ritual they accidentally interrupt. It is impossible to do justice to Karaosmanoğlu's portrayal of the characters and plots in this sweeping epic tale of a revolution failed. While it may seem that all the enlightened fall and the others rise, the novel's thesis runs much deeper than the surface of its stories. There are also unexpected tales of sexual aberration, which are piercing psychological portraits with no apparent political or religious subtext. However, in the aesthetic frame of the novel, they intimate and allegorize the deviation from the course of modernity or the crooked path of modernity itself. Anyone who tries to understand the mis-mapped path of Turkish modernity or world capitalism, for that matter, cannot afford not to read this tome.

Panorama is a novel of ideas, a morality tale, an analysis of the trials and travails of modernity in a land that had just broken its chains of *Unmündigkeit* but was not ready to proceed on its own after Atatürk. Karaosmanoğlu does not lay the blame on Atatürk and the reformist cadre. The nation was not ready to be a secular nation-state. Atatürk may have been an aberration. His own tragedy was that he was a finite being in an infinite project. Karaosmanoğlu sees him as a one-man show, a man who solved insurmountable problems in his lifetime by fiat. As a consequence, the age of the Kemalist revolution came to be referred in the discourse of the rising opposition in the late 1940s as a 27 *yıllık istibdat devri* (a 27-year reign of oppression), as if the War of Independence and the reforms that made possible universal education, women's rights, and freedom from imperialist yoke had never happened. Their memory was erased from national consciousness and replaced by one of violation of human rights: "The fire of the revolution was extinguished when we handed the keys of Kemalist Turkey to the guardians of Babıali, *tembelhane* [the house of the idle/slothful]" (1971: 101).

Halide Edib Adıvar, one of the original members of the Kemalist cadre, an adherent of educational reforms and women's rights, who

was active in the War of Independence, shared many of Karaosman-oğlu's concerns about the fate of the republic. The years both writers spent in exile sensitized them to the complexities of issues concerning national, cultural, and religious identities. However, their views diverged sharply with regard to the path nationalism had to take. Karaosmanoğlu cherished the ideal of a socialist nation built on Kemalist principles. However, in *Panorama* he comes to realize the impossibility of this mission. While enormously respectful of Adıvar's learning and appreciative of their common interest in Western literary classics, he never shared her faith in the peaceful coexistence of Islam with the principles of a modern secular state. *Yaban*'s narrator realizes to his great chagrin that for the Anatolian peasant, Turk and Muslim are opposing identities. *Panorama*'s vast view shifts away from this ever-present cultural divide to an attempt to understand and underscore the ill-fated paradoxes of Turkey's modernity and enlightenment project. In some ways, Karaosmanoğlu's novelistic and novel analysis shows parallels to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1969), especially in its febrile tenor. The premise of *Dialektik* is that the Enlightenment, which was initially a critique of the world of myth and superstition, eventually became resistant to self-critique and turned into what it had criticized – another form of superstition. Instrumental reason valorized method over experience and deemed all experience that did not conform to reason irrational. A genuine understanding of dialectic as resistance to (and questioning of) the falsification of the present and the injustices of history would correct the authoritarian nature of Enlightenment rationality.

It is possible that Karaosmanoğlu never read the *Dialektik*. However, in one of his letters, philosophy teacher Ahmet Nazmi writes to Cahit Halit that "your Fichte," this "enthusiastic apprentice of the great Kant" (1971: 185–6) was totally justified in calling his people to rise up against the invading French in the spirit of Kant's emphasis on freedom as the first requisite of liberation from bondage. However, the paradox of his appeal is that this noble call continued to incite the German people to trample on the freedom of all European peoples (Ibid: 185). This is the same observation Camus makes in *Lettres à un ami allemande* (1965). This passage could have easily been one in Horkheimer and Adorno, who held that the paradoxes of Enlightenment modernity led to a massive betrayal of the masses (1969: 41). References to the German paradoxes of modernity in the epistolary exchange of the two intellectuals of the novel closely parallel the Turkish case. This "family resemblance" comes to the fore when Ahmet Nazmi and Cahit Halit discuss how Germans never respected their intellectuals, such as Fichte and Nietzsche –

interestingly Goebbels is among them – and turned their ideas into their contraries by expert falsification. The intellectuals, nationalists, Kemalist idealists of *Panorama* all head toward tragic ends when their efforts on the part of their countrymen are purposefully rewritten as betrayal of the nation. Insightful metaphors and Karaosmanoğlu's great talent for storytelling and the telling of history make the events tangible, as when Fuat realizes, "so, in fact the reform laws were just a script written on ice" (1971: 413). And as conflicts about nation, religion, and reformism heat up, both the script and the ice melt away. Yet what the heat was about is a question raised and never answered.

Panorama measures up to its title as a monumental portrait of Turkish society not only gripped by the birth pangs and growing pains of the nation but also by the fatigue of the modernization project that became the condition of its survival. As a multigeneric genre, *Panorama* incorporates dramatic convention; the Balzacian scene; social documentary; psychological analyses not only of social neurosis but also of personal psychopathology in the story of a police officer; and depiction of the deterioration of the social fabric and of the absolute demise of any code of ethics that is uncannily prescient of today's Turkey. It is in a way a testament to the idealist activists of yesteryear and those of today who have languished and still languish in prisons. It is a synthesis of all his works, a postscript to his version of the *querelle des anciéns et des modernes*, or a prefatory postscript to the present Turkish condition.

Despite its expansive horizon that encloses myriad challenges to the new nation, *Panorama* is only marginally about religion versus nation (Islamism versus nationalism or Islamic nationalism) but much more about the crooked path of humanity in an overdetermined modernity. The conflict of nationalism and fundamentalism enters a metaphysical dimension in the work of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, who did not belong to any school but was a transitional figure between the reformist writers of the early republican years and the politically engaged as well as the modernist and postmodernist writers of the post-1950s. He is another major Turkish writer and critic whose work deserves a major new study. Tanpınar, who unlike Karaosmanoğlu, was a writer of mystic inclination and a devotee of Islam as a form of high culture, refined another definition of religion as cultural memory. Religion as cultural memory operates on a symbolic scale different than that of nationalism. As an intellectual, Tanpınar never doubted the legitimacy of Atatürk's reforms. At the same time he upheld the legitimacy of Islam as a cultural and an aesthetic point of identification for Ottoman Turkish identity. In his *Mahur Beste* (Composition in the Mahur mode, n.d. [1944]), Molla Bey, a devout and "genuine" Muslim in his own words, sees Islam not

as an abstraction but as cultural memory, preserved in Islamic calligraphy, poetry, art, and architecture. Speaking for Tanpınar, Molla Bey argues that religion lives in the spirit and does not take orders from the clergy. It can even accommodate "*Frenk* (Frankish) invention, but its shape will remain ours" (n.d.: 124–5). In his fictions, Tanpınar tears away the mask of oppressive Islam and recasts its mission in cultural and aesthetic forms. He locates in art the spirit of true Islam that recovers a lost cultural identity and restores it in a form that embodies an enhanced memory and meaning for the present. Less politicized and more aestheticized than Karaosmanoğlu and Güntekin, Tanpınar was, nevertheless, concerned that fundamental Islam would subvert the aesthetic legacy of Islam, its awe and wonder, and make it an instrument of obscurantist and doctrinaire oppression.

While even the shortest analysis of the work of Tanpınar is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is safe to assume that he, along with his early republican predecessors, has been instrumental in shaping modern Turkish letters as a major social force in Turkish life. Their work has shown that the Turkish novel is and has been both a part of the whole historical and socio-political scene and an entity or polity in its own right. It continues to be an astute interlocutor of tradition and social convention, inherited, assumed, or invented. It intervenes in social and cultural spaces as a cautionary tale in the works of Karaosmanoğlu and Güntekin; offers the possibility and validation of a Turkish–Islam synthesis in Adıvar. Tanpınar's novels envision the religious as a form of cultural memory that can coexist with modernity and lend the modern nation a sense of historical identity. A land and its peoples that had to make a quantum leap from an ancient theocratic empire to a modern nation-state could not have been spared the effects of collective trauma. While the modern Turkish novel portrays the lasting effects of this trauma in various symbolic registers, it also brings out the possibility of human capacity for learning and redemption.

Notes

1. The words, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* or TC and pictures of Kemal Atatürk, the founder and the first president of the Republic of Turkey, have been removed from web pages of Turkish universities. Ironically, the web page of the University of Ankara, accessed last on May 17, 2013, displays the insignia, *Cumhuriyetin İlk Üniversitesi* (The first university of the Republic), and several slides in its virtual tour show a crowd of hundreds, apparently professors and students of the University of Ankara, visiting the *Anıt Kabir* (Atatürk's mausoleum).

2. This view is also supported by Georg Simmel's (1980) idea of *soziale Differenzierung* (social differentiation), whereby the price of progress, predicated on a concentration of social dependencies, is a steady intervention of the system in the life of the individual.

3. I would add that in Turkey Islamic customs remained, for the most part, entrenched in the socio-cultural life of the nation, albeit in Turkish costume.

4. "Beyond the scope of this work [*Tales of Crossed Destinies*], perhaps, would have been a consideration of the whole oeuvre of Karaosmanoğlu, who made in his 12 novels a penetrating depiction of Turkey from the end of the nineteenth century until the second half of the twentieth. A major new study of his work, which sets out in symbolism and vivid prose the entire spectacle of the Turkish modernist experience, would be a valuable contribution to the study of the Turkish novel and 20th century Turkey" (Finn 2010: 143).

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3

Becoming Azerbaijani through Language: On the Impact of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə's *Anamın Kitabı*

Zaur Gasimov

As a unifying principle in nationalism, language has played a crucial role in the development of western European nations, foreign-dominated countries in Eastern Europe, as well as in the borderland regions of the Russian and Ottoman Empires. During the nineteenth century, linguistic nationalism spread from European megacities to these distant borderlands. In this dissemination, intellectuals, mostly Turcophone Muslims from the Russian Empire who circulated between St Petersburg, Crimea, Kazan, Baku, Istanbul, and Paris, played a key role. For one of the co-founders of modern Turkish nationalism, Yusuf Akçura, who was born in Simbirsk, studied in Istanbul, and spent years in exile in Paris, a language was "the most important cultural phenomenon" (Akçura 1998: 19). Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), in his programmatic work *Türkçülüğün esasları* (The Principles of Turkism, 2006 [1923]), promoted the idea of establishing the Istanbul dialect of Turkish as the principal language of the Turks and pleaded for the purging of Arabic and Persian loanwords from Ottoman Turkish (Gökalp 2006: 93–100). The Azerbaijani-Turkish entangled intellectual Ali Bey Hüseynzade stressed the linguistic bonds between the predominantly Muslim Turks and Christian Hungarians in his verse "Turan,"[1] which significantly inspired Turanist and pan-Turkist circles among Turkish intellectuals during World War I and beyond. The same preoccupation with language can be found in relation to Azerbaijani writer Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə[2] and his impact on the language issue in the Russian Caucasus and, later, in Soviet Azerbaijan through the forging of what we could call Azerbaijani nationalism.

This chapter seeks to analyze the interconnections between literature and nationalism within the Muslim society of Azerbaijan, a

country culturally linked with Turkey, Russia, and Iran. In the chapter, I examine the development of Azerbaijani nationalism through the history of a literary masterpiece written in 1918–19 and later intensively reflected upon by Azerbaijani communist and noncommunist intellectuals. Azerbaijani nationalism emerged between about 1870 and the 1930s as a by-product of centuries-long encounters and interactions with Russia, with the neighboring Christian Georgians and Armenians, and with Turkey and Persia. Islam – and the Azerbaijani disputes over Islam with regard to neighboring Christians – played a distinct role in its evolution. Can Azerbaijani nationalism be classified in terms of Azerbaijan's disputed geography between Eastern Europe and the Middle East? Even if, as British historian Ben Fowkes has pointed out, "the Azerbaijanis were the first Muslim nation to form a state of their own out of the ruins of the Russian Empire" (Fowkes 1997: 21), they did not have as long a tradition of statehood as the nations in the "third zone of Europe" (Gellner 1996: 32–7) from the Baltic to the Adriatic and Aegean. Part of the Russian Empire, the Turkish-speaking Shiʿi and Sunni population of Caucasia became Azerbaijani during the period of Russian and, later, Soviet dominance. Azerbaijani national mobilization and subsequent consolidation resulted from the observation of similar processes among Gregorian Armenians and Orthodox Georgians as well as Russians in Caucasia.

When Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə (1866–1932) wrote the play *Anamın kitabı* (My Mother's Book, 1920), Azerbaijani nationalism was still emerging. The play can be considered a literary milestone in the nation-building process. The first steps in this process had been taken during the 1870s, when Azerbaijani newspapers were founded and Muslim intellectuals began to promote their own cultural sovereignty within a csarist imperial framework.[3] Against this background, the question is with which particular tools Məmmədquluzadə sought to contribute to the national mobilization of Azerbaijanis? What was the message of his play? And how was/is this play perceived in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan? What was the relationship between nationalism and literature in Azerbaijan, an autonomous region under the officially atheist Moscow-backed regime?

Muslim Caucasia

The Muslim population of the multiethnic Caucasus became a religious minority when the entire region became Russian in the wake of the Russian–Persian wars (1806–28). Since the Middle Ages, Turkish had

been the *koine* of the Caucasian Muslims (Sidorko 2007: 7), even if Arabic and especially Persian were still popular as the languages of science and literature. Russian began to spread in the Caucasus after the migration of numerous Russian and Ukrainian colonists – mostly from the Volga region and Ukraine – in search of jobs in the oil industry based around Baku. In spite of growing Russian political and cultural domination, the Azerbaijani population (both Shi'i and Sunni) was still closely entangled with Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Azerbaijani intellectuals and others for the most part considered themselves Muslim until the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the next century, Azerbaijani nationalism began to coalesce, partly due to external influences but also as a result of Caucasian and Russian interactions. This coalescence was also directly connected to the literary and publicist activities of Azerbaijani intellectuals in the multinational and multi-confessional cities of Tiflis, Baku, and Tabriz (Adam 2008).

The transnational character of the Russian Caucasus on the eve of the twentieth century was based on dense networks and interactions between Shi'i and Sunni intellectuals traveling between Istanbul, Tabriz, Baku, Tiflis, and Kazan. Those communications were in Persian, Turkish, and Russian. This multilingualism was a distinctive feature of the Muslim communities in the borderland region. An educated Muslim in the Russian Caucasus was as a rule able to read and communicate in all three languages. It was under these circumstances and as a result of the continuous penetration of European ideas (nationalism included) into Muslim Caucasia via the Christian intelligentsia (mostly Georgians, Armenians, and Russians), that Azerbaijani nationalism emerged in the early twentieth century. Azerbaijani intellectuals moved between the Ottoman capital of Istanbul, the Russian oil industry center of Baku, and the main czarist municipality in the Caucasus, Tiflis. Several influential Muslim journals and newspapers such as *Fīużāt* and *Kaspii* were founded in those cities. As a reaction to Czar Alexander III's strenuous Russification policy and widespread pan-Slavist ideology, which was actively supported by many Russian intellectuals, a number of Azerbaijani intellectuals – joined by Crimean and Kazan Tatars – promoted the idea of Turan and Turcophone solidarity. During and after World War I, an entangled community of post-Ottoman Turkish, Azerbaijani, Tatar, and Turkestani intellectuals emerged. Some Azerbaijani intellectuals felt close to Russian culture, while others opposed all foreign cultures and favored local traditions. Two consequences flowed from this: first, Azerbaijani nationalist discourse from 1900 to the 1920s was not dominated by a single ideology, for example,

Turkishness. Second, many Azerbaijani intellectuals changed their aims as well as their political and cultural orientations. There were various intellectual movements, but all shared a notion of emancipation and the articulation of cultural sovereignty.

The idea of genuine Azerbaijani nationalism based on belonging to an Azerbaijani nation (*Azərbaycanlı*) developed mainly under Soviet occupation. Azerbaijani nationalists partly dissociated themselves from the Turan concept and pan-Turkist solidarity, focusing instead on Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis. This resulted from two circumstances: first, not all Azerbaijani intellectuals shared the Turanist and Islamic vision. Second, to promote their own nationalist interests, those intellectuals who remained in Sovietized Azerbaijan after 1920 had to accept Russian domination and the communist regime, particularly its nationality policy, which transformed Russian Muslims speaking Turkic languages into Kazakhs, Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, and so on. Their adaptation to the new imperial framework on the Muslim periphery was often only a matter of lip service. After the Red Army seized Azerbaijan in April 1920, nationalist arguments were veiled behind ideological language.

Borderland socialization

Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə was born in 1869 in Nakhichevan, populated mostly by Azerbaijanis, Kurds, and Armenians, and since 1828 a Russian borderland between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Here, he graduated from the *mollakhane*, the traditional Muslim primary religious school, and a three-class Russian school. In 1887, he was already among the graduates of an institution famous throughout the Caucasus, the teachers seminary in the Georgian town of Gori.[4] He spent the following decade teaching at several schools in his home region of Nakhichevan. From 1887 he taught at a primary school in the small village of Nehrem. This stay had a double impact on him: he could observe the social life of a Muslim province as well as learn Armenian from his colleague Tigran Smbatyants (Məmmədquluzadə 1967: 15). In 1895, he traveled to the main political and cultural centers of the Russian Empire, Moscow and St Petersburg. Afterward, Məmmədquluzadə was engaged as a translator for czarist municipalities in Yerevan and Nakhichevan until he moved to Tiflis in 1903. Successfully integrated into the intellectual community of that city, he worked for a local Muslim newspaper, *Şargi-Rus* (Russian Orient), which was published in Azerbaijani.

In Tiflis, Məmmədquluzadə founded one of the first satirical journals of the Muslim world, *Molla* (Mullah) *Nasraddin*, which was published

in Azerbaijani in Arabic script. This made him popular among liberal Muslim intellectuals not only in the Caucasus but also in other parts of the Russian empire, as well as in Persia and beyond. In Tiflis, he met an Azerbaijani intellectual Həmidə, who later became his second wife. Educated in Shusha in Azerbaijani and Russian, Həmidə was the daughter of a rich and noble Azerbaijani family from Karabakh. She had immense influence on Mirzə Cəlil and financially supported his satirical journal. From its foundation in 1906, *Molla Nasraddin* criticized Muslim clerics (mostly Shiʿi) and the level of local education and social life among Caucasian and Persian Muslims. Language as well as the reading culture of Muslim society and lack of education among women were the most important issues in the journal. Actually, *Molla Nasraddin* was the "life project" of Məmmədquluzadə: his novels and other works were a by-product of his journalistic activity and observation of life in the cities and towns of the Caucasus and Persia. Also, his promotion of Azerbaijani nationalism took place through *Molla Nasraddin,* regardless of the fact that it was censored by the czarist authorities. The journal was definitely against the use of the Russian language in everyday communication among Azerbaijani elites, as well as against the use of Arabic script for the Azerbaijani language.

Anamın kitabı

In 1918, when Tiflis became the capital of an independent Georgian state, Məmmədquluzadə moved to Azerbaijan, which, along with Armenia, proclaimed its independence on May 28, 1918. Together with his family, he lived in Karabakh until the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Red Army in 1920. In Karabakh, he wrote his *Anamın kitabı.*

According to the plot, a wealthy Azerbaijani widow Zəhrabəyim lives with her three sons, who graduated from the universities of Petersburg, Najaf, and Istanbul, as well as with her daughter, who has never left the house but was able to "read in Muslim [language] (*müsəlmanca savadlı*)." The sons are fond of the cultures of the cities in which they were educated. Their language is full of words, loanwords, and expressions in Russian, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish, and they understand neither one another with ease nor their own sister and mother. Məmmədquluzadə was concerned about the impact of the neighboring imperial cultures on Azerbaijan and advocated a form of cultural emancipation for Azerbaijani Muslims. The sorrowful mother and her daughter were able to communicate only with three shepherds – prototypes of Azerbaijan itself, uneducated and primitive, but authentic and

native – but not with their own family members and their friends. In the end, Zəhrabəyim dies at home and the sister Gülbahar destroys her brothers' books by burning them: the Russian vocabularies, the Persian books on religion and astronomy, and also the Ottoman poems. The only book to survive this "cultural revolution" is a "book of my mother," a notebook written in simple Azerbaijani by the family's late father, with notes about the children's birth dates and some wishes at the end to ensure the unity of the family.

Anamın kitabı is not a novel but a play. The author provides a precise depiction of its main characters at the very beginning. The theater piece consists of four parts and involves 25 persons. The core protagonists – members of an Azerbaijani family – consist of a 60-year-old mother (Zəhrabəyim), her three sons (Rüstəmbəy, the eldest; Mirzə Məhəmmədəli; and Səmədvahid) and her daughter Gülbahar. The author briefly describes the principal figures: Rüstəmbəy is clothed as a member of the Russian intelligentsia (*rus intelligenti libasında*), so he wears a tie (*qalstuk*) and jacket. He has graduated from a Russian university (*Rus darülfün*) and is an adherent of Russian education (*rus tərbiyəsi tərəfdarı*). Mirzə Məhəmmədəli is quite different. His clothes are Iranian, broad trousers and white socks. He leaves his shoes at the door and sits down on the carpet. The youngest brother, Səmədvahid, studied literature in Istanbul. "There is a fez on his head, he has a sacco, jacket, white-collar shirt and a tie, he wears glasses." He prefers Ottoman education. Gülbahar is dressed as a Muslim girl (*ümumi müsəlman qızları libasında*). "She is fond of her mother," we read in the description at the very beginning. Other characters are servants of the house, the peasants and friends of the brothers, and some neighbors. The setting is "one of Azerbaijan's towns under Russian rule" (*Azərbaycan şəhərlərinin birində, Rusiya hökuməti əsrində*) sometime in the 1910s (Kazımov 2012).

The play opens with a description of the brothers common working room: it contains a big table (*böyük yazı stolu*), several chairs, and a lot of books. There is a table for Rüstəmbəy: "On one side there is a book shelf (*etajerka*) with plenty of books; close to it there is a chair for Rüstəmbəy." The author describes in the same way the corner of the room in which the "Ottoman" Səmədvahid works. "To one side there is a chest, numerous ancient Muslim books with black covers are in and on it. There is a mattress near the chest. That is the place of Mirzə Məhəmmədəli." In accordance with Persian Muslim tradition, the Nadjaf-educated brother reads his religious books on the carpet, while the "Ottoman" and "Russian" brothers study at their tables.

Zəhrabəyim tries to keep her sons together, but they are too ardent in their debates about what is true science, a better culture, and so on. She is eager to consult them about whom their sister should marry. Each brother proposes a close friend, educated and socialized in the same way as he has been. But even the discussion of this issue does not last long: the brothers seem to be quite different in their worldviews and in their language. Zəhrabəyim is despairing and sad: the only people she can trust and communicate with are her daughter, uneducated servants of the house, and peasants. Then the depressed Zəhrabəyim falls ill: the simple anecdotes of the peasants, their folk songs, and conversations with Gülbahar prolong her life for a couple of days until she dies in the arms of her daughter and in the presence of her sons.

Misunderstood and ignored; that is the position of Gülbahar, the servants, and Zəhrabəyim. All the models seem doomed. The salvation of the national cause lies neither along the Russian path, nor along the Persian and Ottoman ones. In this play, Məmmədquluzadə criticizes both the Russian–Azerbaijani mixed language, which was spoken by the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, the Persian-instead-of-Azerbaijani language of the local Shiʿi clergy, and also Ottoman Turkish, which was admired by certain Azerbaijani intellectuals. Məmmədquluzadə wrote in, and thereby promoted, the Azerbaijani literary language based on the spoken language of Caucasian Shiʿa living between Tiflis and Baku, but also in Tabriz.

Play on stage

According to Azerbaijani historians of literature, Məmmədquluzadə completed *Anamın kitabı* in 1920 in Shusha.[5] In June of that year, Məmmədquluzadə moved with his family to Tabriz. From February 1921, he began to publish the journal *Molla Nasraddin* there. In April, Məmmədquluzadə was invited by the Bolsheviks to return to Soviet Azerbaijan, and in summer 1921, Məmmədquluzadə's family was already in Baku. The reception of any literary work in the authoritarian and, since the 1930s, totalitarian Soviet Union was connected with the position of the author and his importance to the regime. The benevolence of the local Communist Party as well as local communist intellectuals was significant for non-Russian literary figures. Being an active atheist, Məmmədquluzadə had a good start in Soviet Azerbaijan. On January 15, 1923, the first performance of *Anamın kitabı* took place at the Dadaş Bünyadzadə Theater in Baku (Məmmədquluzadə 2004: 653). In 1924, the play was on stage in the Rustaveli Theater in Tbilisi. Three years

later the Baku-based Russian director A. Ivanov put *Anamın kitabı* on at the Baku Theater of Workers and Peasants, the capital's main theater.

However, the end of the so-called indigenization period (*korenizatsiia*) caused a rethinking of national literatures on the peripheries of the Soviet empire: critiques of czarist nationalities policy were heavily restricted. Between 1929 and 1932, then, Məmmədquluzadə was out of favor with the communist regime. In 1931, Məmmədquluzadə's main *oevre*, the satirical journal *Molla Nasraddin*, was closed. He was invited to become editor-in-chief of the newly founded journal – and organ of the local branch of the Atheist Movement – *Allahsız* (Godless). Məmmədquluzadə rejected the offer. In January 1932 he died in poverty in his flat in Baku. He was buried in Fəxri Xiyaban, the central and prestigious cemetery in Baku. So, his treatment "from above" was ambiguous: Məmmədquluzadə was no longer favored as he had been in the early 1920s, but neither was he prosecuted or imprisoned like many other writers. Through his network of contacts with communist intellectual elites in Baku, he was able to find a reasonably secure place within an ideological sphere that he never fully supported. The founding of a museum devoted to him was allowed only in the late Brezhnev period, in 1981, and the museum finally opened much later, in 1994.

The play *Anamın kitabı* enjoyed a revival on stage only during the era of perestroika under Gorbachev and in the post-Soviet period. In 1989, the Nakhichevani Theater had *Anamın kitabı* as part of its program for the first time.[6]

Two general dimensions of the work's reception

The *Encyclopedia of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə*, published in 2008 in Baku, presents a long list of PhDs and post-doctoral research papers devoted to Məmmədquluzadə. No work on *Anamın kitabı* had been written by 2014, even if its author had been thoroughly examined in Azerbaijan and beyond (Hitchins 1983: 30–5; Uygur 2005: 9–18). With regard to Azerbaijani research on Azerbaijan's national literature, it was actually divided into research in exile and research in Soviet Azerbaijan. When the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic was occupied by the Bolsheviks in 1920 and became one of 15 Soviet republics, a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals – among them numerous linguists and historians of literature – left for Europe. Educated mostly in Paris and Istanbul, they stayed in Europe or moved to Ankara. Azerbaijani émigré research on Azerbaijani history and literature began in the 1920s. The academies and universities in Baku – the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan – first had the opportunity

to read those articles and books during the perestroika era at the end of 1980s, and only in the 1990s did a type of "merged" literary research appear in Azerbaijan.

Over the years, *Anamın kitabı* was evaluated by Azerbaijani intellectuals both within and outside Soviet Azerbaijan. In Berlin in 1936, the most prominent Azerbaijani émigré intellectual, former chief-of-state Məmməd əmin Rəsulzadə (1884–1955), published his short monograph *Çağdaş Azerbaycan Edebiyatı* (Modern Azerbaijani Literature, 1936), based on his speech delivered at a conference organized by Ukrainian, Caucasian, and Turkestani emigrants in Paris. In this work, Rəsulzadə tried to show the main trends in Azerbaijani literature, but also the circumstances of its development under the Soviet regime. His account of *Anamın kitabı* began with a statement that the play had been forbidden in the Soviet Union. Rəsulzadə briefly depicted the essence of the masterpiece and pointed out the significance of the author's main message: the three brothers should not be alienated from their mother. It is interesting to see how he contextualized the play with regard to both his own perspective and the émigré reception of the Soviet reality: "The Communists who try to alienate the society from its roots have forbidden putting this play on stage, because it was appealing to the society to keep in touch with its own traditions" (Resul-zade 1936: 9).

In Wiesbaden in 1965, Ahmet Caferoğlu (1899–1975), an Azerbaijani linguist, graduate of the Oriental studies department of the University of Breslau and professor of Turkish linguistics at the University of Istanbul, published a longer article on the history of Azerbaijani literature. According to Caferoğlu, *Anamın kitabı* was written in 1919, during the period of Azerbaijan's independence and without a framework of foreign dominance. Caferoğlu continued that Məmmədquluzadə could work without restriction on this piece (Caferoğlu 1964: 684).

Nationalist but Soviet: Mirzə İbrahimov and beyond

Anamın kitabı's criticism of Russia was accepted by the Bolsheviks, because it corresponded with the zeitgeist of the Soviet Union's the so-called *Korenizatsiia* policy that prevailed until the mid-1920s and tolerated criticism of czarism. The playwright and influential communist politician Mirzə İbrahimov,[7] along with other Soviet–Azerbaijani intellectuals, praised Məmmədquluzadə for his critique of religion. He spoke the language of ideology but promoted Məmmədquluzadə's late works in his critical essay *Böyük demokrat* (Great Democrat, 1939). Being an active communist, İbrahimov was a prototype of a nationalist-minded

Azerbaijani intellectual. In 1954, after the death of Stalin, İbrahimov became a chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan and reformed the constitution of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic by including Azerbaijani as a state language along with Russian.

The first edition of *Böyük demokrat* was published in Baku in 1939, and the second was published in 1957 under the editorship of the well-known Azerbaijani writer Mir Cəlal Paşayev.[8] There are significant differences between the two editions that help to explain why the author's works were not banned under Stalin. In the book, İbrahimov drew attention to the fact that it was Məmmədquluzadə who first used the notion *Azərbaycan milləti* (Azerbaijani nation) in an article published in the newspaper *Keşkul* in 1890. *Azərbaycanlı* was also the signature of one of the feulletonists of the newspaper. İbrahimov republished the conversation between an Azerbaijani and a foreigner described or fictionalized by Məmmədquluzadə in *Keşkul*:

> Foreigner: *Siz nə millətdənsiniz*? (What is your nationality?)
> Azerbaijani: *Müsəlmanam* (I am a Muslim)
> Foreigner: *Xeyir, mən soruşdum ki, nə millətdənsiniz*? (No, I asked which nation you belong to.)
> Azerbaijani: *Müsəlmanam, deyirəm*. (I say, I am Muslim.)
> Foreigner: *Əf əndim, millət ayrı, din ayrı. Bildim, dininiz islamdır, ancaq istərdim biləm millətiniz nədir?* (Sir, nation and religion are not the same. I see your religion is Islam, but I wanted to know about your nation).
>
> <div align="right">(İbrahimov 1957: 92)</div>

The Azerbaijani is driven to despair by the foreigner's questions and recommends that he pose the question to Mullah and Akhund. The foreigner answers his own question by saying: Your nationality is Azerbaijani. In 1891, according to İbrahimov, *Keşkul* was closed down (İbrahimov 1957: 92).

The remarkable aspect of the two editions of Ibrahimov's *Böyük demokrat* is not only the change in views expressed but also the choice of language to express them. The 1939 edition, which emerged at the zenith of Stalinism, has plenty of citations from Stalin's works (İbrahimov 1939: 145). İbrahimov defended Məmmədquluzadə by criticizing and condemning the Azerbaijani émigré intellectuals in Europe or Turkey. He wrote on the patriotism of Məmmədquluzadə and simultaneously reproached Rəsulzadə, Ağaoğlu, and Hüseynzade – three Azerbaijani intellectuals and promoters of Turanism – for "servitude to

Turkey and anti-Azerbaijani strategies." The critiques in the second edition are much less belligerent. İbrahimov mentions Ağaoğlu again, but there are no longer any citations from Stalin or criticisms of Musavat.[9]

Məmmədquluzadə's wife Həmidə was engaged by the Academy of Sciences in Baku in 1934 to edit the memoirs of her late husband. In 1938, at the height of the Stalinist purges, she completed the project: 59 exercise books, of 20 pages each, in Russian (Məmmədquluzadə 1967: 10–11). At the same time, *Anamın kitabı* was not popularized as widely as Məmmədquluzadə's other works, such as *Ölülər* (The Dead, 1909) because of its nationalistic content and opposition to Russian education. *Ölülər* criticized only religious rituals and the behavior of the clergy, so its popularization served the interests of the Bolsheviks. While criticizing Islam, the play was not anti-Russian at all. However, since the mid-1950s *Anamın kitabı* has been staged many times in Azerbaijani theaters. In 1994, it was turned into a film.

In Soviet Azerbaijan, Məmmədquluzadə was extolled as an atheist intellectual and adherent of modernization. His major works were published and republished and became an obligatory part of school curricula. However, *Anamın kitabı* was an exception, even if it indirectly criticized religious education in Iran. It was not among Məmmədquluzadə's plays published in 1959 in Russian translation in the Moscow-based Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury (State Publishing House for Literature). Nor can one find it even in the edition of his select works published in Armenian in Yerevan a year earlier. In the 1960s, one of the most prominent Soviet Azerbaijani poets, Rəsul Rza (1910–81), wrote a verse under the title *Anamın kitabı*. Rza, who was quite conformist with regard to the official ideology of Brezhnev period, describes a dialogue with his mother and her attitude to an ancient book in their house. The pages were "yellowed and the lines were like mountain paths" (Rza 1967). His mother told him that she had got it from her ancestors and he should continue to read it after her death. If he stopped reading it, he would lose the connection with his own past and culture, thereby also abusing his mother. Rza demonstrated in that short verse the importance of reading his own mother's book, in other words, a book in the Azerbaijani language. The verse was published in 1967.

At the end of the 1970s, Bəxtiyar Vahabzadə wrote his *Anamın kitabı*, a short two-page poem that directly references the "original" text by Məmmədquluzadə. The verse begins with the author's devotion to Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə. Vahabzadə, a favored Soviet Azerbaijani poet, was

known among intellectuals of Baku as a conformist and quite nation-
alist author. After Stalin's death, Vahabzadə published several poems
and verses on the importance of the mother tongue and promoted the
spread of the Azerbaijani language, which competed with Russian, the
only official language in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan until 1956.
In *Anamın kitabı,* Vahabzadə condemned those Azerbaijanis who dis-
tanced themselves from national culture and values. Vahabzadə did
not target czarist or Soviet language policy, which allowed Russian to
dominate in Azerbaijan, but criticized instead the Arab and Persian dom-
inance of the past. Soviet-Iranian relations were dramatically strained
in the 1960s and 1970s due to Tehran's cooperation with the United
States. Harsh criticism of Iran arose in Soviet Caucasia and Central Asia.
Vahabzadə, famous for his anti-Iranian poem "Gülüstan," attacked the
Persian poet Shakhriyar in his *Anamın kitabı*:

> Let Shakhriyar pardon me,
> Thirty long years he called the aliens "*barādar*" (lit. brother).
> In his own motherland,
> He called his mother "*mādar*" (lit. mother).

<div align="right">(Vahabzadə 2004: 48)</div>

The Persian words for "brother" (*barādar*) and "mother" (*mādar*) are
for Vahabzadə synonyms for traitorousness, ingratitude, and lack of
national consciousness. Məmmədquluzadə's long half-Persian and half-
Azerbaijani monologues were symbols of religious fanaticism and
belong to the Shiʿi community. Vahabzadə presents the use of Persian
in the northern part of Iran, populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis, as
a betrayal of national consciousness. The fact that many ethnic
Azerbaijanis living in multinational Baku mainly used Russian in every-
day life – and even among themselves – was not even mentioned by
Vahabzadə.

In 1974, another Soviet Azerbaijani poet, Məmməd Araz, published a
poem *Atamın kitabı* (My Father's Book). In place of the language issue,
the focus is on extolling the virtues of village life and nature. The poem,
written between 1970 and 1972, consists of several "confessions" by the
poet to his father. Araz wrote, "Nature is a sort of library. Each cave is a
school, each mountain is a teacher. It's my mother tongue, that book is
my mother" (Araz 1974: 118). In praising nature and relating language
to the provincial environment and local Azerbaijani nature, Araz chose
the obviously altered title of Məmmədquluzadə.

After the Soviet collapse

During perestroika, Azerbaijani nationalism enjoyed a rebirth. Liberal-ization "from above" as well as a territorial dispute with neighboring Armenia prompted intense debate about the national past, language, and literature. Azerbaijani intellectuals went through a postcolonial phase of rethinking their identities. Literary works, historical events, ideas, and traditions were revisited and redefined, and "enriched" with retrospective views.

One of Azerbaijan's most famous writers, the present head of the National Writers' Union Anar Rzayev, wrote in the foreword to the 2008 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə*: "I think that by writing *Anamın kitabı*, Məmmədquluzadə entered the discourse on the triad *Islamlaşmaq, Türkləşmək, Müasirləşmək* [lit. to become Muslim, Turkish, contemporary/modern, alternatively Islamicization, Turkification, Modernization] which was initiated by Ali Bey Hüseynzade and deepened by Ziya Gökalp in Turkey" (Anar 2008: 23). Məmmədquluzadə propagated *Azərbaycancılıq* (Azerbaijanness), which meant being *Azerbaycan türkü* (Azerbaijani Turk) and speaking *Azərbaycan Türkçəsi* (Azerbaijani Turkish). Məmmədquluzade may also be considered the founder of Azerbaijani consciousness (*Azərbaycançılıq şüuru*), even if he never used this notion. Anar wrote an article, "The problem of understanding," for the famous Soviet literature journal *Novyi Mir*. For the reprint in Baku, censors planned to cut that part of the article concerning Məmmədquluzadə's critique of the czarist Russification policy. However, Ismail Şıxlı, a chief editor of the journal *Azərbaycan*, the main organ of the Writers' Union of the Azerbaijani SSR, managed to convince the censors not to make the cut (Anar 2008: 26).

Anamın kitabı stood against extreme Westernization as well as extreme orientalization, the Azerbaijani literary critic Zöhrə Əliyeva wrote (Əliyeva 2010: 139). There is no doubt that Məmmədquluzadə knew of the ideas of Ali Bey Hüseynzade and Ahmet Ağaoğlu. They had worked at the same time in Tiflis, issuing journals in Azerbaijani and Russian for a Muslim readership. Məmmədquluzadə accepted Bolshevik rule and died in Baku in 1932; Ağaoğlu and Hüseynzade spent the rest of their lives in exile in Turkey, becoming extraordinarily well inte-grated into its political and intellectual life. The reinvention of this interconnected and entangled Turkish-Azerbaijani intellectual space by modern Azerbaijani writers and essayists is the result of perestroika, which resulted in the "return" of emigrant literature to Azerbaijan and the fall of the communist regime.

During perestroika, the issue of national language became one of the most emotional topics for the Azerbaijani Popular Front, an organization of Baku intellectuals that challenged the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and Moscow in 1989–91. Its leaders argued for greater use of Azerbaijani in official communications and the linguistic integration of the huge Russophone community residing mostly in the capital Baku. Literary works such as *Anamın kitabı*, despite their having been written long before, gained prominence because of the contemporary situation. There was a reinvention and repopularization of the work. It even rivaled Məmmədquluzadə's most famous, and until then most popular, work *Ölülər* (The Dead).

Nationalist reception of a literary work is, as a rule, accompanied by social and political change. In Azerbaijan today, Azerbaijani enjoys the status of official language. While it is predominant in local politics, Russian and Turkish secondary and high schools are popular among the population. Moreover, Russian and Turkish television, soap operas, and pop culture attract more interest than the ill-equipped Azerbaijani TV channels. Russia, Turkey, and Iran are the main destinations for Azerbaijani emigrant workers. In 2009, a well-known Baku-based essayist, Iradə Tuncay, published an essay *Ananın kitabı* (Your Mother's Book). She criticized the mostly Russian-Azerbaijani and Azerbaijani-Turkish mixed-languages often used by TV presenters. "Zəhrabəyim also has sons speaking English, French etc. Which books should Gülbahar burn now?" Tuncay is here referring to one of the last chapters in *Anamın kitabı*, when Gülbahar burns the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman books of her brothers. In Tuncay's essay, English and French speaking mark a new stage in the continuity of Azerbaijani discourse on "books of mothers." This view corresponds with the new challenges the oil-rich nation has encountered since the fall of Communism in 1991.

A trajectory of *Anamın kitabı*

Language has played a crucial role in the development of Azerbaijani nationalism. Confronted with other cultures and languages in his environment and family,[10] Məmmədquluzadə promoted the Azerbaijani language through his publicist activities and works like *Anamın kitabı*. Endorsing the language issue as a cardinal aspect of his model of Azerbaijani nationalism, Məmmədquluzadə became one of the most prominent atheist intellectuals in the Muslim Caucasus and beyond. Educated in a *mollakhane* and socialized in extremely religious

environments, he criticized, in his journal, the Muslim clergy and their attitude toward the "national language."

After his death, Məmmədquluzadə's ideas were supported by several generations of intellectuals regardless of their ethnic origin and political views. The communist Mirzə İbrahimov protected the literary legacy of Məmmədquluzadə by proclaiming him "a great democrat." While İbrahimov worked on his monograph, Həmidə was writing her memoir of the writer's life. The philologist Abbas Zamanov (1911–93)[11] prepared both the Russian edition and the Azerbaijani translation of her memoirs. In the first project, he was supported by the famous Azerbaijani literary critic Əziz Şərif (1895–1989) and in the latter by the doyen of Azerbaijani philology, Həmid Araslı (1909–83). One could observe similar reactions among the Azerbaijani émigré community in Europe.

Məmmədquluzadə's popularity among Azerbaijani intellectuals after 1991 was based on the issue of the Azerbaijani language. During the Soviet period, cultural and political life in Baku was dominated by Russian. During perestroika and after the collapse of the communist regime, the language issue assumed paramount importance. That led to the reinvention of *Anamın kitabı*. The secularism of the new political elites in post-Soviet Azerbaijan secured the authority of an atheist author like Məmmədquluzadə.

As in the West, in the Muslim world fictional literature and nationalism are closely interrelated. The reciprocal use, and misuse, of nationalistic rhetoric and literary works depends on current politics and the prevailing zeitgeist. Written in a pre-Soviet period, *Anamın kitabı* was seized upon by Azerbaijani émigré intellectuals in Europe and instrumentalized by those in Soviet Azerbaijan, just as it was later in the post-Soviet era.

Notes

1. In *Turan*, Hüseynzade praised the "ancestral commonness" of Turks and Hungarians. For him, Hungarian Christianity and Turkish Islam should not obstruct close cooperation between both peoples. This short verse was written by Hüseynzade during his studies at the University of Istanbul in 1892. He tried to publish it later in the Cairo-based newspaper *Turk*, but without success. In 1915, Yusuf Akçura published it in *Türk Yurdu* (Hüseynzadə 2007: 23, 459).
2. The personal names of Azerbaijani intellectuals are used here in the Latinized script, introduced into the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2000. The Azerbaijani alphabet also uses "ş," "ç," "ğ," and "ı," as in Turkish, and "q" (like the English "g"), "ə" (like the second "e" in German *Leben*), and "x" (German "ch" in *Bach*).

3. The second of the three stages proposed by the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch (Hroch 1996: 62–3). According to Hroch, a tiny group of intellectuals, mostly linguists and historians, launched the nation-building, primarily as an intellectual discourse, through their preoccupation with the national language and literature. In the second stage, the number of intellectuals and cultural associations grows and the national cause becomes an issue for national elites. During the third stage, a national movement, ready to challenge foreign domination and aspiring to political rights, emerges as a conglomerate of the intelligentsia, clergy, and broader society.

4. The main task of this teachers' seminary was to prepare primary and secondary school teachers for Caucasia. The language of instruction was Russian. Many prominent Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Dagestan intellectuals graduated from the seminary.

5. The original handwritten text has been preserved in the archive of the Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences in Baku.

6. See http://calilbook.musigi-dunya.az/n/naxchivan_dram_teatr.html (last accessed August 26, 2012).

7. Mirzə Ibrahimov was born in 1911 into an Azerbaijani family in a small village in northern Persia. In 1918 he and his family moved to Baku to work in the oilfields. Ibrahimov belonged to that group of Azerbaijani intellectuals who were socialized in Persian and Soviet Azerbaijan and had relatively weak affiliations with Turkey. Between the 1930s and 1950s, he had a brilliant carrier in local politics and as a writer of novels eulogizing Soviet progress and the like. Simultaneously, he promoted Azerbaijani nationalism by thinking not in terms of Turcophone solidarity but in terms of Azerbaijani geography.

8. Mir Cəlal Paşayev was born in 1908 into an Azerbaijani family near Tabriz, northern Persia. He studied literature and oriental studies in Kazan and Baku and was preoccupied with Fizuli. Like Ibrahimov, Mir Cəlal had an academic and public career in Soviet Azerbaijan, while also writing his novels (e.g. *Manifesto of a Youth*, 1939), which were wholly consistent with social realism.

9. Founded in 1911, Musavat was primarily the nationalistic party of Caucasian Turks, and was a leading party during the short-lived independence of Azerbaijan (1918–20).

10. Məmmədquluzadə's wife wrote her memoirs in Russian and they wrote letters to each other in Russian, even if they sporadically used Azerbaijani phrases and word combinations. Məmmədquluzadə's children attended Russian schools.

11. Born in Nakhichevan, Abbas Zamanov studied literature in Baku. From 1971, he was a chair of Soviet Azerbaijani literature at Azerbaijani State University. In 1993, he died in Baku and was buried in the same cemetery as Həmidə and Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə.

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4
The Kurdish Novel and National Identity-Formation across Borders

Hashem Ahmadzadeh

The role of the novel in the development of national identity has been widely acknowledged by literary and other scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Novelistic discourse in established nation-states is well enough entrenched to address questions related to social and individual identity, and stateless nations certainly cannot avoid concentrating on the role of the novel in the construction of national identity. The case of the Kurdish novel is telling in this regard. It also illustrates how the search for national identity is combined with a struggle for democratic rights. By analyzing the themes developed by prominent Kurdish novelists based in four countries with large Kurdish minorities, namely Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, this chapter aims to show how Kurdish narratives challenge the homogenizing policy of existing nation-states, whereby a single identity is imposed on the ethnically and culturally distinct inhabitants of their territory.[1] Despite their different social, political, and cultural backgrounds, Kurdish novelists have in common the critical questioning and challenging of existing territorial borders. These novels represent both the cultural and political dimension of Kurdish nationalism and reflect the struggle by Kurdish people for a future, common Kurdish land.[2]

Kurdish novel: Problems of definition

Defining the Kurdish novel is in itself problematic, mainly for two reasons. First, the very idea of the novel or a novelistic tradition is generally thought to be related to the existence of a nation-state. However, since Kurds have not yet established a state of their own, "Kurdish" refers only to the linguistic or cultural aspects, unaffiliated to a distinct Kurdish state. Second, because Kurds have since the early decades of the

twentieth century been spread across four different states, their political and cultural identity has become fragmented. This fragmentation has been further exacerbated by the fact that the Kurdish language has two main dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani or Northern and Southern Kurdish, and three different orthographies, namely modified Aramaic or Arabic/Persian, Latin, and Cyrillic. The latter circumstance is directly related to the political situation in the region, namely that Kurds are divided among four states, each imposing its own cultural policies. In practice, this has meant that modern Kurdish literature, not least the Kurdish novel, lacks linguistic and orthographic unity.

The rise of the Kurdish novel is the result of a number of socio-political and cultural changes that occurred during the early decades of the twentieth century.[3] The nation-states that emerged from these processes have not granted Kurds democratic rights, including the right to education in their native tongue. In Turkey, for example, until the early years of the current century, it was forbidden to even use the Kurdish language in the public sphere. Because of their minority status and the fact that Kurdish intellectuals have mostly been polyglot, Kurdish novelists have used languages other than their own in mastering the art of the novel. Prominent Kurdish writers such as Salim Barakat in Syria, Yaşar Kemal in Turkey, and Ibrahim Yunesi in Iran belong to a generation that published their novels in the official languages of the governing state. The main narratives in these novels generally deal with the Kurds, but the fact they are not written in Kurdish has led to a debate in Kurdish intellectual circles as to whether they can, in fact, be considered Kurdish literature. Some participants in this debate even question the authenticity of the works of those Kurds in the diaspora that write in other languages. However, others, myself included, think that since this literature mainly deals with Kurdish issues, it should be classified as "Kurdish literature in other languages."

The novel in the Middle East generally arose in the early twentieth century. The formation of the new nation-states in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was more or less accompanied by the appearance of the novel in the official languages of these new political constructs. In the case of the novel in Kurdish, however, it arose in the absence of a Kurdish nation-state as a direct consequence of the way in which the new nation-states treated ethnic minorities within their political and geographical domains. For political and ideological reasons, the first Kurdish novels appeared among the Kurmanji-speaking Kurds in the former Soviet Union in the early 1930s. These were Yezidi Kurds who had migrated from the Ottoman Empire to Russia during the latter

years of the nineteenth century to escape religious discrimination and harassment by the Ottomans. It took several decades before some of the novels published by Soviet Kurds were transcribed or translated into the Sorani dialect.

Political restrictions imposed by host nation-states prevented any continuity in the development of the Kurdish novel. Even today, the Kurdish novel suffers from a lack of common readership. For example, novels in Kurmanji do not find readers among the Sorani-speaking Kurds, and vice versa, not only because of the differences in dialect, but also because of different orthographies. In fact, novelistic discourse in both these major dialects has developed without any significant mutual influence.[4] As the Kurdish novels published in the former Soviet Union were generally not accessible to Kurds elsewhere, they did not become a source of cultural capital and heritage for the further development of the Kurdish novel. Thus, the rise of the novel in each part of Kurdistan followed its own path.

A further major impediment to the development of the Kurdish novel has been the lack of a promising market. It is only during the past few years that Kurds have had a real chance to freely publish books in Kurdish. The flourishing of Kurdish publications in Iraqi Kurdistan, mostly with the official sponsorship of the major political parties in Kurdistan and the Kurdistan regional government, demonstrates the importance of political and economic backing for the development of publishing, especially of the novel.[5]

The relative flourishing of the Kurdish language in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the fact that there was a limited opportunity for education in Kurdish after the emergence of the Iraqi state in the early 1920s, resulted in the gradual rise and development of the Kurdish novel in Sorani as well. However, the first published Kurdish novel in this dialect, *Peshmerge* (Partisan, 1961), was not authored by a Kurd from this part of Kurdistan. Ironically, it was written in the Soviet Union by a Kurd, Rahim Qazi, exiled from Iranian Kurdistan. In fact, prior to this novel in Sorani, other Kurdish novels were written, but for various political and cultural reasons these were only published in the early 1970s, prior to the defeat of the Kurdish nationalist movement in 1975 in Iraq. Thus, based on the date of its publication, *Peshmerge* is the first Kurdish novel to be written in Sorani. The book was published in 1961 in Baghdad. Ibrahim Ahmad's *Jani Gal* (Suffering of People) was first published in 1972 in Iraqi Kurdistan. It is interesting to note that both these authors were active politicians involved in the Kurdish nationalist movement. The main themes in their novels deal with national

liberation and the hard road toward its achievement. Even the titles of these novels reflect their deep affiliation with the national question. For years, these two novels were rare examples of the Kurdish novel in Sorani.

In Iranian Kurdistan, the Kurdish novel only developed in the 1990s. However, the Kurdish diaspora has served as a golden opportunity for the development of the Kurdish novel, as the publication in the diaspora of the first Sorani novel shows. In fact, the Kurds from Turkey could not have published any novels but for the existence of the diaspora. Indeed, the Kurdish diaspora acted as the mainland of the Kurdish novel for some decades. However, as a result of new political openings in Turkey since the early 1990s, and the radical political achievements in Iraqi Kurdistan following the uprising of 1991, which resulted in Iraqi Kurds governing major Kurdish territory in that country, the publishing of the Kurdish novel shifted from the diaspora to much more fertile space, namely, Iraqi Kurdistan, Istanbul, and Diyarbakir. By the early years of the second decade of the new millennium, the list of Kurdish novels published in Turkey numbered approximately 200 titles. During the past two decades, the list of the Kurdish novels in Iraqi Kurdistan has grown threefold. Given the socio-political condition of the Kurds, this is a relatively good track record. Moreover, during the relatively open political era in Iran under Mohammad Khatami between 1996 and 2005, several Kurdish novels were also published there.

While there is considerable growth in the number of Kurdish novels, the quality of these novels nonetheless remains a matter of concern. Among published Kurdish novels, one can find some that are relatively successful from a literary and artistic point of view, but in comparison with novelistic achievements at the international level, the Kurdish novel still has a long way to go. The dominant theme in the Kurdish novel is still the national one and traces of statelessness are easy to find.[6] This stands, perhaps, in contrast to a major recent trend in the Western novel, cultural globalization. In her introduction to a much later edition of *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter (1999 [1977]: xxxiii) argues:

> With the globalization of culture, moreover, the national boundaries of the novel are fading and disappearing. Was Sylvia Plath a British or an American writer? Can the influence of Toni Morrison fail to affect the novel in Europe? The distinctions of nationality and culture I meant to imply in the title of *A Literature of Their Own* are no longer as sharp as they were only twenty-five years ago.

Contrary to the almost universal effect of globalization on the "distinctions of nationality and culture," national boundaries are strongly present in the Kurdish novel, whose main themes show deep affiliation with the question of national identity. As such, the Kurdish novel has mainly portrayed Kurdish individuals in their struggle against all obstacles to achieve national and democratic rights. While some published Kurdish novels hardly deviate from traditional patterns of narration, others imitate internationally recognized narrative schools and techniques. Some Kurdish novelists, besides reflecting on the reality of Kurdish societies, have been ambitious enough to discuss ontological and existential questions. However, these attempts have not always been matched by a proper language able to deal with such abstract questions and issues. The vocabulary and structure have been wanting. In some of these novels, the language is mostly the language of romance, which, in comparison with the language of the novel, is lofty, elevated, poetic, and epic. Events depicted in some of the Kurdish novels remind the reader of Wellek's (1956: 216) definition of romance as that which "describes what never happened nor is likely to happen." The limited dialogues in such novels, and the absence of the "dialogic principle" formulated by Michael Bakhtin (1988: 262), have resulted in the Kurdish novel's failure to personalize characters according to the speaker's characteristic features. Consequently, the characters in such novels lack individuality and mostly represent social types.

"We" and "Others" – "Us" and "Them"

To shed further light on the special circumstances of Kurdish novel production, the work of four Kurdish novelists, one each from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, will be presented. In the works, the dichotomy between "we" and the "others" is one of the main features of and prerequisites for constructing an identity. In Mehmed Uzun's[7] novels, the narratives deal mainly with a marginalized people who struggle to prove their existence by distinguishing themselves from their imposed identities. Uzun's historical novels provide the reader with a background to the oppression of Kurds by the "others." In them, Uzun reconstructs the lives of famous Kurdish nationalists and intellectuals and their struggles on behalf of the Kurds and their democratic rights. In *Rojek ji Rojen Evdale Zeynike* (A Day in Evdale Zeynike's Life, 1987), a troubadour narrates one day in the life story of Evdale Zeynike, a legendary Kurdish troubadour. It is commonly believed he lived in the nineteenth century. The narrator is

patronized by two famous Kurdish intellectuals, Jaladat and Kamuran Badirkhan, who live in exile but contribute to the construction of the Kurdish nation by writing down the troubadour's songs. The multicultural Ottoman Empire, the narrator states, has given way to an imposed homogenization policy in which there is no space for non-Turkish cultures and language. The narrator, referring to modern times and the establishment of the republic of Turkey, sadly complains of the illegalization of speaking Kurdish. He explicitly refers to occasions when those who uttered Kurdish words were fined.

By retelling the story of two Kurdish freedom fighters in the first half of the twentieth century and by highlighting their endeavors, the narrators of Uzun's *Siya Evine* (The Shadow of Love, 1991) and *Bira Qadare* (The Well of Destiny, 1995) remind readers of the life of two influential Kurdish intellectuals and politicians who devoted themselves to the Kurdish question. The epic tone and mystical aspect of the novels highlight the struggle of two real contemporary Kurdish personalities, Mamduh Salim and Jaladat Badirkhan, who devoted their lives to the rights of the Kurds. Uzun's longest and last novel *Hawara Dijlaye* (The Cry of Tigris, 2002) is a historical account of the agony of the Kurds who have historically lived along the Tigris. The narrator of the novel, again a troubadour, tells through his ballads the story of those who have been forgotten, defeated, and oppressed. The troubadour's epic song focuses on the last Kurdish emir of Jizire, Mir Badirkhan, and his defeat by the Ottomans in 1848. Hearing the constant references to the "glories and regrets" of Badirkhan's life and the "rich legacy of memories," the reader feels a deliberate "construction of a national sense" (Renan 1990: 19).

In *Roni Mina Evine Tari Mina Mirine* (Light like Love and Dark like Death, 1998) the question of identity is the central issue. The novel, by creating two allegorical countries, clearly sets out the dichotomy between "we" and the "other." While the people of the "Mountain Country," clearly an allusion to Kurdistan, struggle to preserve their identity, the army of the "Big Country," an allegorical reference to Turkey, denies their identity and suppresses all endeavors against the official policy of the state. The idea of *welat* (country) is frequently repeated and the whole story is full of love and national feelings for the country. The people of the "Mountain Country" have always lived in this old country. Their ancestors have been there for 77 generations and they think that the foreigners should leave (Uzun 1998: 31). One of the main differences between the "Big" and the "Mountain Country" is language, and one of the "Big Country's" oppressive policies is the imposition of its language on the people of the other country. "Big

Country's" official policy is based on denial of the "Mountain Country's" identity. This policy suppresses every aspect of identity that differs from the imposed official one.

In his two autobiographical novels, *Tu* (You, 1984) and *Mirina Kaleki Rind* (Death of a Nice Old Man, 1989), Uzun reflects on the condition of the Kurdish language and the fact that its use in the public sphere was forbidden. The main character of *Tu* narrates the years of his imprisonment for writing a poem in Kurdish. In both novels, the narrators share their stories of exile, looking for their identity, home, and the hard conditions they have faced.

An imagined land to a lost and denied people

The creation of an imaginary land with clearly realist allusions to Kurdistan is the main feature of Halim Yusiv's novels.[8] The main character in *Gava Masi Ti Dibin* (When the Fish Gets Thirsty, 2008), Masi (lit. fish), thirsts for freedom. In Masi's country, surrounded by myths, people do not have a language. The narrator, using a magical realist mode, follows Masi's life across the borders of Kurdistan in search of his love, Bafrin, a girl originally from northern Kurdistan. Masi's search finally leads him to the mountains of Kurdistan, where he becomes a guerrilla and loses both his legs in a military operation. The imagined greater Kurdistan is a perpetually existing map in Masi's mind during his trips outside Kurdistan. On his visit to Diyarbakir, the main Kurdish city in northern Kurdistan, Masi finds his relatives there. The political borders drawn by different nation-states have divided the Kurdish people as well as Kurdish families, something that motivates Masi even more to fight for the unification of his land. After discovering that Bafrin has been arrested, Masi leaves Kurdistan for Europe. At numerous points in the novel, reference is made to the importance of borders and their role in dividing the different parts of Kurdistan and keeping them apart.

In his first novel, *Sobarto* (Sobarto, 1999), Yusiv narrates the story of the country Sobarto and its lost people. By means of various mythological and religious allusions, Sobarto allegorically represents the land of the Kurds. The novel recounts the life of Sulaiman, the protagonist of the story, from his childhood to his adult years. Sulaiman, one of the survivors of a fire that burned down a cinema in Amude, a Kurdish city in Syria, tells of his childhood.[9] The revolutionary movements in different parts of Kurdistan, for instance, Mustafa Barzani's movement in Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1960s and 1970s and the movement led by the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) in the 1980s and 1990s, have

their own effect on Sulaiman's character. Sulaiman's love of Belqis is also shaped by the political events in Kurdistan, in that his relationship with her goes up and down in parallel with the ebbs and flows of politics.

In his *Tirsa Be Diran* (Toothless Fear, 2006), Yusiv tells of a country completely dominated by toothless fear. A rootless scare is evident in every corner of this country. A disease, causing everyone to cough, spreads across the city. It is only in March that this disease can be cured. This is a clear metaphor for the importance of March in Kurdish modern history.[10] The magical realist aspect of the novel helps to highlight the existing political situation in Kurdistan, where the presence of masses of grasshoppers can simply be read as the presence of soldiers who control people's daily lives. One of the characters in the novel is a philosophically minded man Kalo, who writes a book on the history of fear, and argues in it that the birthplace of fear is Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Real events are referred to in the novel, as well as the way in which they affect the lives of the characters.[11] Ironically, one of the novel's main characters is a history teacher, but because he is not content to teach the official history of Syria, he leaves the country to seek asylum in Germany. After a while, he leaves Germany for London. There, he suffers from hallucinations and on one occasion attacks an Englishman convinced he might be Sir Mark Sykes.[12]

Challenging the official narratives

Ata Nahayee[13] narrates the modern history of the Kurds and of the various social, cultural, and national challenges facing the newly established Iranian nation-state during the early decades of the twentieth century. In *Guli Shoran* (The Shoran Flower, 1998) he tells of one of the main achievements of Kurdish nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan, namely the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan in January 1946 in Mahabad, and its decline in December of the same year. Las, the protagonist in the novel, is denied the right to speak his language and be educated in Kurdish. After the collapse of the republic, he leaves for Iraqi Kurdistan, where he is imprisoned by Iraqi authorities for 15 years. Later, he returns to his hometown in Iranian Kurdistan. However, after staying only three days in his home, he commits suicide.

In *Balndakani Dam Ba* (Birds With the Wind, 2002), two protagonists represent a generation of Kurds who took an active part in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in the hope of achieving freedom and democratic rights. Soon after the Iranian Revolution, however, they are disappointed. Their destiny reflects the failure of the high ideals of a

generation who never succeeded in providing themselves with an identity that could be defined in terms of nationality and belonging. The final stages of their lives show how disappointment, hopelessness, and defeat become the main features of their characters. In *Grawi Bakhti Halala* (Betting on Halala's Fortune, 2007) the main protagonist, Halala, leaves "home" to die in exile. As in Nahayee's other novels, the question of Kurdish identity occupies a central role in the dialogues between the main characters of the novel. The idea "where is our country?" (Nahayee 2007: 39) is, in fact, the main theme of the novel.

Fading borders

The borders between the parts of Kurdistan in Bakhtiyar Ali's[14] novels have mostly faded. In his *Kashtiy Frishtakan* (The Angels' Ship, 2013), the parents of the protagonist, Nizar, are followed by the narrator from the very beginning of the novel. Nizar's father travels from somewhere in southern Kurdistan to eastern Kurdistan to find a woman to marry. The journey takes some two years and finally he meets a woman, Parisa, in a village near Mahabad, one of the main cities of Iranian Kurdistan (Ali 2013: 17). He marries Parisa and they return to his hometown. Toward the end of the novel, when thousands of Iraqi Kurds leave their homes near the Iranian borders during the early months of 1991, the protagonist takes his seriously sick friend to hospital in Mariwan, a city in Iranian Kurdistan. In *Ewaray Parwana* (Parwana's Evening, 1998) references to the various parts of Kurdistan are in accordance with Kurdish nationalist discourse, which considers Kurdistan a divided country, its parts being the northern part, that is, Turkish Kurdistan; southern part, Iraqi Kurdistan; eastern part, Iranian Kurdistan; and western part, Syrian Kurdistan. The main literary mood and style in Bakhtiyar Ali's novels is magic realism.[15] However, the realist aspects of his novels closely relate to the situation of the Kurds and Kurdistan by crossing the official borders between the parts of Kurdistan. The allegorical, and especially the magical, mood of Ali's novels highlights the question of identity and the continuing contest among various forces to shape and construct a distinctive and desirable identity. Magical realist texts can act as an historical form. As Mikics argues, when discussing the significant role of magic realism in the formation of identity in postcolonial countries, magic realism is "a self-consciously historical form" (Mikics 1995: 373).

Comparing events in the novels from the time of the Kurdish administration in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991 with previous events during the era of centralised Iraqi regimes, one sees a major shift in Ali's attitudes

toward Kurdish politics and authorities. The major conflicts in Ali's novels, or those parts of his novels that deal with the years prior to the Kurdish uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, are mainly between Kurds and their "others." In his novels dealing with the post-Saddam era, it is the Kurdish administration and the newly emergent Kurdish bourgeoisie or rich strata that become the main target of his protagonists. In *Ghazalnus u Baghakani Khayal* (The Lyricist and the Gardens of Fantasy, 2005b) we read of the new bourgeoisie and the Kurdish political and economic upper stratum in the form of barons who control all aspects of sociopolitical and cultural life in Kurdistan. They are the residents of "Nwemiran" district (the area of the new Emirs), where they enjoy absolute power over all societal resources. The barons resist the free imagination of the lyricist and his friends, and in an instant fight against them, aiming to destroy their "Gardens of Fantasy." In his *Jamshid Khani Mamim ka Hamisha ba lagal Khoyda Daybird* (My Uncle Jamshid Khan whom the Wind always Carried with Itself, 2010), the protagonist, who has been imprisoned by the Ba'ath regime, loses so much weight he can be easily borne away by the wind. After flying to many different countries, he finally comes back to his "home," Kurdistan.

Novel, nation, and language

The Kurds live as minorities in four countries and many other Kurds live in the diaspora. They have been subjected to the dominant discourses of those nation-states that govern them. The role of the Kurdish language as a uniting factor is a complicated issue, due to the existence of two main dialects and three orthographies. Challenging socioeconomic conditions and underdeveloped urbanization have not favored the development of novel writing. However, despite all these political and cultural obstacles, the Kurdish novel has developed considerably since the second half of the twentieth century.

The novels discussed in this chapter generally portray the Kurds as a people suffering at the hands of oppressive regimes. The Kurdish novel is a vehicle for clearly showing the agonies of a nation. Cheah argues that "[a] particular nation and its characteristics can be made the referent and theme of the novel's plot and characters" (Cheah 1999: 8). The world of the Kurdish novel is generally characterized by the question of identity, in this context, first and foremost, national identity. The idea of language as a main factor in differentiating Kurds from their neighbors has been frequently pointed out. Kurdish narrative discourse as

presented in the discussed novels contributes to distinguishing between "us" and "them" as a dynamic factor in constructing a new identity. By narrating the suffering of the Kurds at the hands of their "others" and reflecting on their struggle for liberation, the Kurdish novel is a medium that contextualizes the historical memories of the Kurds and can effectively contribute to the construction of a Kurdish national identity. Despite belonging to different parts of Kurdistan, the protagonists in these novels, by crossing officially and internationally recognized political borders, resist the imposed political geography of those nation-states that govern the different parts of Kurdistan. The Kurdish novels discussed, like other "Third World texts," simply act as "national allegories" (following Jameson 1986: 69). However, thanks to various linguistic, cultural, and social differences, which have been accentuated by the Kurdish dispersal among four nation-states, Kurdish novelistic discourse is characterized by its fragmented features. These features can hardly play a positive role in the construction of a unified Kurdish national identity.

Uzun's orthography, the modified Latin alphabet, and dialect, Kurmanji, make his novels readable to Kurds in Turkey and Syria and those living in the diaspora with roots in these countries. They are generally written in metaphorical, highly descriptive and simple language. The setting of his novels is the Kurdish areas of Turkey and Syria. His style is strongly influenced by Turkish language and literature. Similarly, Yusiv's novels would appeal to readers in the first instance in Syria and Turkey and the diaspora as well. His style, having been influenced by Arabic literature and language, is highly descriptive. Yusiv's characters, like Uzun's, struggle to find their origins, which have been denied by others. Nahayee and Ali, writing in Sorani with a modified Arabic/Persian/Aramaic orthography, are influenced by Arabic and Persian literature. Ali makes explicit and direct reference to the Kurds and their vision. His magic realist style does not prevent him from alluding to the Kurds and Kurdistan directly. It seems that Nahayee's style and indirect reference to the national identity of Kurds stem mainly from his residence in Iran, with its wide political and ideological restrictions. Despite these differences, these novels and their characters are above all distinguished by their language, Kurdish, and their setting, Kurdistan.

Notes

1. In selecting the most prominent Kurdish novelists from four parts of Kurdistan, the quality and number of produced novels has been taken into consideration. The choice of Mehmed Uzun, Helim Yusiv, Ata Nahayee, and

Bakhtiyar Ali followed from my review of the Kurdish book market, literary journals, and literary debates in Kurdish newspapers and on Kurdish visual media.

2. In another article, I have noted that Kurdish novelistic discourse involves "an imagined community" that is related to the aims of Kurdish nationalism (Ahmadzadeh 2012).

3. For the emergence of the new nation-states in the area and the destiny of the Kurds following the decline of the Ottoman Empire, see, among many other works, Natali (2005). For a detailed review of the rise and development of the Kurdish novel and the external and internal reasons for it, see Ahmadzadeh (2003).

4. In 2002, I organized a conference on the Kurdish novel in Stockholm, where I introduced two of the most famous Kurdish novelists, Mehmed Uzun (1953–2007), who lived in Sweden and wrote in Kurmanji, and Bakhtyar Ali, who lives in Germany and writes in Sorani. Neither had any knowledge of the other's works. In recent years, some initial efforts have been made to transcribe and translate Kurmanji novels into Sorani, and vice versa.

5. In recent years, 10,000 copies of certain novels have been published, a high number, taking into consideration the readership in Kurdistan. One such novel is Ali's *The City of White Musicians* (2005a), published in 2005 by Ranj, a publishing house in Iraqi Kurdistan. In 2013, Ali's other novel, *Kashti Frishtakan* (The Angels' Ship), was published in Silemani, one of the main Kurdish cities in southern Kurdistan. Again, the print run was for 10,000 copies. This 900-page novel is the first of three volumes.

6. For a study of the traces of statelessness in the Kurdish novel, see Ahmadzadeh (2005).

7. Mehmed Uzun (1953–2007) was born in Siwerek, a Kurdish city in Turkish Kurdistan. After finishing high school, he went to Ankara, where he was to continue his studies. In 1972, he was arrested and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In 1976, for issuing the Kurdish journal *Rizgari* (Liberty), he was arrested again. After being imprisoned for six months, he was released. In 1977, he moved to Sweden and lived there until 2006. Uzun was a member of the Swedish Writers Union. In 2000, he was elected to the International Parliament of Writers, a worldwide organization for freedom of speech founded by Salman Rushdie. On May 23, 2001, he received the prize for freedom of expression from the Turkish Association of Publishers. During his life in exile, he published seven novels (see Bibliography).

8. Helim Yusiv was born in 1967 in Amude in Syrian Kurdistan. He has lived in Germany since 2000. By now he has published three novels (see Bibliography).

9. On November 13, 1960, the only cinema in Amude was burned down and more than 300 Kurdish children died (see http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/kurdwatch_kinobrand_en.pdf, last accessed April 16, 2011.

10. March is the first month in the Kurdish new year. March 21 is the first day of the new year, and is widely celebrated by Kurds as their national day and as a symbol of the victory of the people over tyranny and oppressors. In Kurdish modern history, there have been many important political events in this month, including the autonomy agreement with the Iraqi regime on March 10, 1970, the chemical bombardment of the Kurdish city of Halabja in

1988, and the Iraqi Kurdish uprising in March 1991 against Saddam Husein that resulted in the liberation of many Kurdish cities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

11. The unrest in the Kurdish city of Qamishli in March 2004, in which scores of Kurdish demonstrators were shot and hundreds arrested, are clearly referred to.

12. On one occasion, the exiled protagonist attacks a blond man in a London street, supposing him to be the British diplomat Sykes, who, together with his French counterpart Picot, signed an agreement in 1916 that paved the way for the division of Kurdistan following World War I.

13. Ata Nahayee was born in Bane, a city in Iranian Kurdistan, in 1960. He has by now published three novels (see Bibliography). He has also published three collections of short stories, *Tangana* (Straits, 1995), *Zrika* (Cry, 1993), and *Ew Balnda Brindara ka Minim* (That Wounded Bird that I am, 2004). He has also published a series of translations into Kurdish of Persian literary works.

14. The Kurdish author Bakhtiyar Ali was born in Silemani, Iraqi Kurdistan, in 1960 and has been living in Germany since 1996. In recent years he has visited Kurdistan numerous times. His first novel, *Margi Taqanay Duham* (The Death of the Second Only Child), was published in 1997 in Sweden. Since then, he has published seven more novels (see Bibliography). Thousands of copies of his recent novels have been printed in Kurdistan. One of the publishers of his novels in Kurdistan, Ranj, is reported to have paid him an advance percentage on the indicated price of his published novels, something absolutely unprecedented in Kurdistan. In a report published on the BBC website it was noted that "Ali has been paid $25,000 by a publisher in the Kurdish region of Iraq, which has printed 10,000 copies of *Ghazalnus and the Gardens of Imagination* (Ghazalnus u bakhchakani khayal)" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7535854.stm, last accessed February 18, 2009).

15. In Ahmadzadeh (2011), I discuss the stylistic features of Ali's novels.

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Part II

5

Nedjma: Kateb Yacine's Deconstruction of Algeria's Colonial Historiography

Abdelkader Aoudjit

The principal task of Kateb Yacine's famous novel *Nedjma* is to engender a consciousness of the deplorable conditions of Algerians during the French occupation and to open up the possibility of a new, modern nation in which Algerians are masters of their own destiny. Closely related to the theme of national independence are two other themes: undermining the colonialist representation of Algerian identity[1] and establishment of a new image, and, since shared memories of a real or imagined past are essential to national identity and social cohesion, the recovery of Algerian history.

Since its publication in 1956, *Nedjma* has been the subject of various studies. However, these have been limited in perspective. Most are devoted to one of two topics: the innovative structure and narrative techniques (Gontard 1985; Bonn 1990; Maougal 2003), and the political message (Maougal 2004; Guetarni 2007). What literary critics have so far failed to do is establish a connection between these two aspects. This is unfortunate, because one cannot fully understand the political meaning of the novel without taking into account its structure and narrative techniques. It is now well established that the form of novels and their content are inseparable. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, "form and style are not incidental features...[they] express a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not" (Nussbaum 1992: 5). This chapter seeks to redress this problem by identifying the novel's principal structural elements and narrative techniques and explaining how they coincide with and reinforce Kateb's aim to deconstruct colonialist history as a step toward rebuilding Algeria as a modern nation-state.

However, the rearticulation of Algerian identity, including reclaiming its history, is fraught with difficulty. First, defining the Algerian nation was a matter of controversy and a source of intense debate among nationalist factions. During the War of Independence, conflicts among Algerians were sometimes as violent as conflicts with colonialists. The controversies stem from the fact that modern Algeria is heir to a mixed legacy, where perceptions of Arab, Amazigh, Muslim, French, socialist, or liberal identities depend on what aspect of Algerian history is being emphasized. Second, at the conceptual level, the idea of identity is, in the words of Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meaning, and encumbered by reifying connotations" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 34).

The major obstacle to recovering Algerian history, however, lies even deeper; namely, in the "deep grammar" (Wittgenstein 1958: 175) that underlies colonialist history, including its taken-for-granted Enlightenment notions of objectivity, linearity, and inevitability.[2] Such grammar is so pervasive and insidious that in the attempt to craft a counter-history, one may unwittingly reaffirm rather than undermine the colonialist ideology, which includes, in addition to historical linearity and inevitability, the idea of ethnic purity (Meynier 2010). Kateb warned against visions of Algerian identity based on ideas of ethnic purity or primordial origins. He sought instead to discredit the tribalism of some factions and advocate a vision of a modern nation characterized by pluralism and openness to others. Kateb's aim, therefore, is not merely uncovering those aspects of Algerian history that have been repressed or conveniently forgotten in colonialist history, but a critique of the power–knowledge nexus of which colonialist historiography is part (Foucault 1980: 154). As Hayden White famously argued, form is an important determinant of content in historical writing (White 1979), which means that the concepts, methods, and rules of colonialist historiography determine what can and what cannot be said. Kateb's project also involves questioning essentialist thinking on the grounds that it is divisive and colonialist.

Plot and structure

Nedjma is a complex novel structured around four narratives. The first follows the fortunes of four young men, the brothers Lakhdar and Mourad and their cousins Mustapha and Rachid, as they wander across the country in search of work. It also describes what they see, their fights with the colonial authorities and the settlers, and their many arrests and escapes from prison. These events are interspersed with flashbacks

to their less-than-happy childhoods and, most memorably, to Lakhdar's and Mustaphas's participation in the traumatic events of May 8, 1945, when thousands of Algerian demonstrators were killed by the French army with the help of the air force, the police, and civilian militia.

The second narrative engages with Algeria's precolonial and colonial history. Kateb mentions Emir Abdelkader (Kateb 1956: 96),[3] Jugurtha (195), the Numids (164, 165, 166, 210), and the Beni Hillal (17). He tells of how Algerian peasants were driven to the mountains and less fertile lands; describes the harsh realities of colonialism, including poverty and continual harassment; and also laments the disunity among the Algerian factions in the years preceding the War of Independence.

The third narrative concerns the lineage of the four friends' married cousin, the mysterious and elusive Nedjma, with whom all of them are madly in love. Finally, Rachid's obsession with Nedjma's pedigree and his family's origin sets up a semi-mythical fourth narrative about the Keblout tribe, from which Nedjma as well as the four protagonists are supposedly descended. All these narratives are closely interlinked through framing, thematic concerns, plot parallels, and cause-and-effect relationships, and the novel shifts continually between them.

A useful way to understand the structure of the novel is to arrange chronologically the major events of the frame story – the story of the adventures and misadventures of the four friends, which are few and reasonably easy to identify, and compare them with the way they appear in the text (see Table 5.1). Even though such reorganization is contrary to the spirit of modernist/postmodernist works and may detract from the enjoyment – and frustration – that readers may want to experience while struggling through the novel, it can serve as a roadmap should they become lost in Kateb's labyrinth.

Narrative techniques

Disruption of chronological narrative

The most conspicuous of the novel's formal aesthetics is its complex temporal structure. Even though a narrative thread runs through the book – at least as far as the frame story is concerned – the story is not told in a linear narrative manner. The novel opens when Lakhdar, having escaped from prison, joins his brother Mourad and their friends Rachid and Mustapha in the spring of 1947. However, the events that have led to his arrest, his striking of the foreman M. Ernest, are not revealed until the second chapter of Part II (44–7, 48), after the description of the imprisonment of Rachid for being a deserter and hitting a settler three years after Lakhdar's arrest (32). The events of May 8, 1945, and

Table 5.1   Storylines and narrative structures in *Nedjma*

Chronological order of events	Narrated order of events
1. The childhood of the young men and their growth into adulthood.	6. The incidents of the worksite. Part I: Chapters 1–8.
2. Rachid's meeting Nedjma in a clinic in Constantine.	7. The dispersal of the friends. Part I: Chapter 9.
3. Rachid's aborted pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by Si Mokhtar, a suspicious character 50 years his senior.	10. Rachid in Constantine and his dispute with a European motorist. Part I: Chapter 10.
4. Lakhdar and Mustapha's participation in the May 8 demonstrations and their subsequent arrest.	11. Rachid in prison, where he injures Mourad. Part I: Chapter 11.
5. The gathering of the four friends in Bône in May 1946.	6. The incidents of the worksite. Part II: Chapters 1–2.
6. The incidents of the worksite, including the fight with foreman, M. Ernest, and the killing of M. Ricard in May 1947.	4. Lakhdar and Mustapha's participation in the May 8 demonstrations and their subsequent arrest. Part II: Chapters 3–8.
7. The dispersal of the friends.	1. The childhood of the young men: Lakhdar and Mourad. Part II: Chapter 10.
8. Rachid and Si Mokhtar's kidnapping of Nedjma and taking her to Nadhor, the alleged ancestral land of the Keblout tribe.	5. The gathering of the four friends in Bône in May 1946. Part III: Chapters 9–12.
9. Rachid's arrival in Constantine and his spending time in Abdallah's inn/opium house.	2. Rachid's meeting of Nedjma at a clinic in Constantine. Part III: Chapter 12 and Chapters 2a–3a.
10. Rachid in Constantine and his dispute with a European motorist.	3. Rachid's aborted pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by Si Mokhtar. Part III: Chapters 6a–12a.
11. Rachid in prison, where he injures Mourad.	11. Rachid in prison, where he injures Mourad. Part III: Chapter 12a.
12. Rachid as the manager of Abdallah's inn and his descent into opium addicts' hell.	8. Rachid and Si Mokhtar kidnapping of Nedjma. Part IV: Chapters 3–7.
	1. The childhood of the young men and their growth into adulthood. Part IV: Chapters 8–11.

Lakhdar's arrest for participating in the demonstrations are related by Lakhdar himself on his way to prison in Chapters 2 to 8 of the second part (47–8). The childhood of the protagonists is not tackled in detail until the fifth part. Such is the case throughout the novel: the usual temporal distinctions such as before and after, past and present, and beginning and end are eliminated.

The above structure highlights one of the basic themes of *Nedjma*: events in the present are the result of past actions and events, and the past has a direct impact on the future. Thus, the past is constantly present and cannot be so easily discarded. For example, there is no way the events of 1945 are forgotten in the 1950s – they are always painfully present not only in Lakhdar's and Mustapha's minds but also in Algerian collective memory. Those events changed the relations between French colonialists and Algerians once and for all and demolished any hope of a solution other than armed struggle. Indeed, they served as a prelude to the war of liberation. Kateb also collapses temporality to convey the idea that the past, in Steven Knapp's words, "play[s] a normative role,"[4] in the sense that it provides standards for deciding upon appropriate future courses of action. As Kateb puts it, "[w]e wanted, before envisioning the future, to know all the surviving remnants of the tribe, to verify

our origins either to draw up an assessment of failure, or to attempt a reconciliation" (138).

Multiplication of points of view

Another narrative technique Kateb uses successfully is the juxtaposition of multiple versions of a single story as told by a variety of narrators. For example, he does not use one central narrator through whom the reader learns the story of Nedjma. Rather, the story is narrated from the perspective of Si Mokhtar (101–3), Rachid (93–5, 163), Mustapha (88), and Mourad (90–5), each of which is different, allowing us to witness action and characters from a number of vantage points. Furthermore, each narrator performs as both protagonist and observer, the main character in his own story and a supporting character in others' stories. Mourad, for example, not only puts forward his own version of Nedjma's tale but also compares it favorably to Rachid's (97). By providing multiple versions of and varying perspectives on events, Kateb problematizes the concept of historical objectivity and foregrounds the constructive and ideological nature of historical narratives: histories highlight some events and obscure others often in the service of particular interests, while claiming to provide an objective and neutral representation of the past.

Stream of consciousness

In addition, Kateb depicts the past by means of the reflection, dreams, and recollections of his characters, often using stream of consciousness – showing thoughts and feelings as they flow randomly through the minds of his characters. The adoption of first-person point of view and stream of consciousness also serve to highlight the narrative quality of historical writing and criticize the idea of objectivity. Si Mokhtar, Rachid, and Mourad, who tell Nedjma's story, have the probable limitations of all first-person narrators. They can be unreliable for a variety of reasons: they can be ignorant of important elements, not remember correctly, misinterpret events, withhold information, or either inadvertently or purposely mislead. Thus, Si Mokhtar, who is the first to tell Nedjma's story, abandons his children (91), betrays his friends (94–5), defrauds those who give him money to say prayers on their behalf in Mecca (105), and lies about being robbed (115). His behavior makes the reader doubt the veracity of the story he tells. This doubt is increased by the fact that he may very well be the murderer of Rachid's father. Can one believe the ramblings of an old man who is a pathological liar, an adulterer, a fraud, a traitor, and probably a murderer? Rachid and Mourad are not reliable either. Rachid tells the story of Nedjma first while suffering from fever and hallucinations due to malaria (93–5)

and later to a journalist while smoking opium (163). At some point, he himself doubts the veracity of his own story when he asks Mourad, "[T]ell me Mourad, tell the truth. Do you think that it is fever that makes me say what I say?" (94). Finally, Mourad has heard the story from Rachid who has heard it from Si Mokhtar. He has also heard the story from Lella N'fissa, who has her own ax to grind and has not told him everything she knows. For instance, she has informed him that Nedjma's mother is Jewish, but she has omitted to say that Si Mokhtar and her husband have always been rivals (97). It is in the absence of an original and untainted story of Nedjma that the interest of this aspect of Kateb's novel lies.

Blurring the distinction between genres

Yet another technique that is often mentioned in studies of *Nedjma* but has not been tied explicitly to its theme is the blurring of the distinction between genres. Although there is a narrative thread running through the book, dreams (126), memories (37, 47–58), interior monologues (88, 98), journal entries (75–9), history (37, 95–6, 168), poems (49–50, 114), and myths (116, 125–6) interrupt the story. Furthermore, in *Nedjma*, the history of Algeria is written most of the time in semi-poetic style, as illustrated by the description of the May 8 events (49). What the blurring of genres suggests is that different representations of history are more like works of literature than they are like natural science. As a result, they cannot be true or false in a scientific sense any more than poems or myths can. Indeed, it is not clear if the story of the Keblout tribe is fact, fiction, or both. Kateb mentions two Keblout ancestors: one who supposedly flourished in the thirteenth century (116–18) and another in the nineteenth (118–20). There are indeed a few families in the Guelma region of Algeria who claim descent from a certain Keblout, and it is conceivable that six men of the same tribe were executed by the French army in 1854 as described in *Nedjma* (118–19). But Keblout's origin is shrouded in mystery: according to some people he came from Morocco (Meynier 1981: 207) and to others from the Middle East (Bertrand-Cadi 2004). However, the very existence of Keblout is questionable as, according to popular legend and reported in *Nedjma*, to settle in the region, he had to fight a vulture that kept rising like a phoenix from its ashes (125–6; Boumaza 2005). In addition, Keblout's story is told originally by Si Mokhtar, who is not a reliable narrator (116–17).

Metafiction

Finally, *Nedjma* includes several instances where narrators are aware of and refer to their versions of past events as made up, a postmodern

technique called *metafiction*,[5] reinforcing the idea that historical representations are constructions. For instance, at one point Mourad compares his and Rachid's knowledge of Nedjma's history and concludes that his is more accurate as Rachid does not have all the facts, "because he could not have known what I know" (97). Even Rachid himself seems to consider the whole Nedjma story as nothing but a delirium (97).

Spiral view of history

The multiplication of points of view, stream of consciousness, blurring of distinctions between genres, and metafiction in combination disrupt many implicitly accepted historical categories and assumptions, such as objectivity, linearity, and impartiality. They also open new possibilities. The recognition that representations of the past are constructions, in the sense that what historical facts mean is produced rather than discovered, permits colonialist history to be challenged and alternative visions put forward. Recognition that history was used in the past to support political agendas and ideologies indicates that previously marginalized groups may also so use it in the service of their moral and political ideals. That was Kateb's choice. He intentionally set out to replace colonialist history with a new one, and that new representation of the past is to be put forward for an explicitly moral and political purpose.

For Kateb, however, to oppose the version of Algerian history that is promoted by the colonialists in the tradition of the realist novel that is linear and chronological is counterproductive. The idea is that traditional narrative cannot adequately represent the trauma of Algerians and their experience of history in which past, present, and future; fact and fiction (94, 164); dream and reality interpenetrate and are in constant tension. Furthermore, traditional narrative helps maintain the hegemony of colonialist discourse because it imposes an artificial order on a chaotic history and inhibits change, as it makes the actual social order appear to be inevitable and revolution an aberration.

Thus, Kateb replaces the conventional linear historiography of the colonialists and the circular historiography they erroneously attributed to precolonial Algeria (Graebner 2007: 139–63) with a spiral conception of history. Indeed, the most striking technical feature that appears from the outline of the novel sketched above is that important episodes of the story are told more than once. The worksite scene, in which Lakhdar has a dispute with foreman Ernest, for example, is presented twice: first, in Chapter 1 of Part I, then in Chapter 2 of Part II. Another example is the

tragic events of May 8, 1945: they are presented first in Chapters 4–8 of Part II, then in Chapters 2 and 3 of Part VI. Similarly, Rachid's fight with the European motorist is reported first in Chapter 10 of Part I, then in Chapter 12 of Part IV and Mourad's violent encounter with M. Ricard is told, first, in Chapter 7 of Part I, then in Chapters 6a and 11a of Part IV.

However, the retelling of events in the story is not simple repetition. The subsequent passages develop the previous ones; each section of the book moves forward and backward in time, adding meaning to the one that precedes it. In Part I, Section 1, for instance, the reader learns that Lakhdar has had a fight with the foreman, M. Ernest, and has wounded him: "Here's our friend Lakhdar who fixed Monsieur Ernest . . . Not the first time a foreman gets thrashed by a laborer" (10). No further details are given about the incident. However, at the beginning of Part II, we find a detailed description of the same quarrel:

> His lips stained with cauliflower sauce,
> Monsieur Ernest walks toward Lakhdar; this time,
> his daughter's outburst having raised him to the
> summit of heroism, he throws the yardstick into the
> trench; Lakhdar turns around, seizes the foreman
> by the throat, and with one blow opens his head
> along the eyebrow; *a draw!* Say the witnesses' involuntary
> smiles. (46)

Similarly, when Lakhdar is arrested for striking M. Ernest, he remembers his earlier arrest following his participation in the May 8 demonstration:

> But the Europeans ganged up.
> They moved the beds around.
> They were showing each other their daddies' weapons.
> There was no principal or supervisor.
> There was no smell from the kitchens any more.
> The cook and the bursar had run away.
> They were afraid of us, of us, of us!
> The demonstrators had evaporated.
> I went into the study hall. I took the pamphlets.
> I hid *the Life of Abdelkader*.
> I felt the force of the ideas.
> I found Algeria irascible. Its breathing.
> The breathing of Algeria was enough.
> Enough to chase away the flies.
> Then Algeria herself became.

Became treacherously a fly.
But the ants, the red ants.
The red ants came to the rescue.
I left with the pamphlets.
I buried them in the river.
I drew a map in the sand
a map of a future demonstration. (49)

In Chapter 2 of Part VI, Kateb, in characteristic fashion, goes over the same events, only now he includes Mustapha, describes in detail the insurrection and its aftermath and puts it in a larger historical context:

The peasants are ready for the parade.
"Why the devil have they brought their
cattle?"
Field workers, factory workers, shop-keepers. The sun.
A lot of people. *Germany has surrendered.*
Couples. Bars crowded.
Bells.
Official ceremony: monument to the dead.
The police keep their distance.
Popular counter-demonstration.
Enough promises. 1870. 1918. 1945.
Today, May 8, is it truly victory?
Scouts march past first, then students.
Lakhdar and Mustapha march side by side.
The crowd swells. (217)
....
The anthem begins on children's lips:
From our mountains
rises the voice of freemen. (217)
....
A security officer, hidden in the
shadow of an arcade, shoots at the flag.
Hail of bullets. (217)
....
The French mayor is shot down by a policeman. (218)
....
[T]he last groups give way to gunners' nests; the army blocks the
central avenue, firing at the rags; the police and
the settlers carry out their operations in the poor districts; not
one door is left open. (218)
....

women have been raped; round-ups were suggested
by the settlers, organized into armed militias,
as soon as they heard about what happened
in Setif. (219)
…………………… ……………………
The peasants are machine-gunned.
…………………… ……………………
Cries of the crickets and the police kicking the suspects.
The bodies are exposed in the sun. (219)

The events of 1945 are taken up once more from Mustapha's point of view in Chapters 3 and 4 of Part VI. In those chapters, Mustapha reports the tragic murder of a poor and simple-minded young woman, the abuse the Algerian prisoners are subjected to, and the impact his arrest has had on his family; his mother goes insane and his father becomes bedridden, gravely ill.

My father was "sunning" in front of
the door. He kept saluting invisible soldiers …
All evening, he kept going at me: I was crazy, I
thought I was smarter than everybody else, I'd
get my parents massacred, etc. My mother was
crying. The nagging intensified after the
      curfew, when a carbine bullet shattered the head
      of the mad woman of the village, a starving and
      solitary girl … She was shot down near our
      house on her way to the fountain. (220)

Mother can't talk any more without tearing her face,
      raising the pupils of her dried eyes to the sky.
She speaks to the birds and curses her children.
      She's been chanting
the prayers for the dead for me. Despair is followed
      by melancholy, then torpor. (226)

Thus, throughout the novel, events are presented succinctly and at times imprecisely to be expanded and made more precise at later points in the story either through the addition of new information or by being presented from different points of view. As the novel proceeds, the meaning of events becomes more complex and more comprehensive.

The unconventional chronology of weaving together forward-telling with backward-telling, repetition, and plurality of viewpoints

determines the structure of the novel and evokes the image of a spiral.[6]
The spiral progression of the novel indicates a new attitude to history:
the very notion of history as events following one another in a necessary
causal order is called into question, as is the idea that history is circular.

Unlike the causal ordering, the spiral view of history conceives of the
past as being alongside the present, not behind it. For instance, Kateb
says the different invaders who have occupied Algeria over the centuries
have left indelible marks on its history and its culture (29). And unlike
the circular view, which, like the medieval Wheel of Fortune, is fatalistic,
the spiral view of history is open-ended. Lakhdar's escape from prison,
which is reported twice, and his participation in the May 8 demonstra-
tions, for example, set up a pattern that the reader expects to be carried
out again, just as he ought to expect the end of French occupation, based
on the end of the previous Ottoman and Roman occupations. Kateb's
message is that in order for Algerians to liberate themselves and build
a new modern nation, they must first free themselves from the past's
limitations and not repeat the sins of their fathers, who squandered
whatever wealth they salvaged from colonialist expropriation (96):

> The land, for example, was lost in the struggle against
> the French; Mourad's great grandfather fought under
> Abdelkader's banner, and was thus exposed to the reprisals
> of Bugeaud who distributed the most beautiful domains to
> the European settlers. The cash, however, was
> wasted by Sidi Ahmed who danced the Charleston and
> practiced polygamy. (72)

At the same time, Kateb maintains, Algerians should hold fast to the
spirit of resistance and solidarity shown, for instance, by Abdelkader and
Jugurtha. This is worth passing down from one generation to the next.
In other words, Algerians should use history in a creative way: "It is
sufficient to remember the ancestors to discover the triumphal phase,
the key to the victory that eluded Jugurtha, the indestructible seed of a
nation caught between two continents" (165).

Kateb also advocates the incorporation into Algerian culture of some
of the transformations brought about by colonization. Thus he, like
Mouloud Mammeri, advocated the use of French as part of Algerian
national culture:

> The conquest was a necessary evil, a painful grafting that brought
> a promise of progress to the nation split by the ax. Like the Turks,

the Romans, and the Arabs, the French could not help but put down roots, hostages of the country whose favors they fought for. (29)

In an interview on French television in 1956, he said that "the French language has shaped our [Algerian] soul." Kateb reiterated the same idea in a more recent interview with Algerian-born journalist Jean Daniel: "You will have a new Algerian literature of French expression, whose foremost advantage for me will be that Algeria cannot be locked either in Arabism or Berberism. There is a place for French. We are the country of three languages and three roots" (Daniel 1999: 16).

Nation and narration

The struggle over historical representation is also a struggle over identity and nation; nation and narration are not easily separated – the one implies the other. Just as Kateb deconstructs the colonialist version of Algerian history that represses large sections of it, so does he reject the notion of a static and constraining Algerian identity associated with both colonialist and certain nativist ideologies in favor of a vision of Algeria as a nation of interdependent and overlapping identities: Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, and French. Thus, Kateb is as critical of those who are nostalgic for an Arab-Islamic golden age and who want to obliterate the transformations wrought by French colonization to justify and reinforce their power, as he is of the colonialist tendency to repress the Amazigh and Arab heritage of Algeria or to call Algerians simply *Arabs*. Indeed, to further strengthen their power over Algerians, colonialists and their apologists denied all complexity to Algerian society by presenting it as one-dimensional, and called all Algerians, even those who do not speak Arabic, Arabs, as if the word Arab denoted a race, a natural and fixed essence. The use of the word "Arab" limits the Algerians' sense of identity and constrains them. During the occupation of Algeria, colonialists used the term to feed their prejudices. More maliciously, as Ahmed Lanasri has pointed out, they used it to claim the name "Algerian" for themselves and affirm that the Arabic-speaking Algerians were invaders from the Middle East, suggesting thereby that Algeria was predestined to be invaded by outsiders (Lanasri 1994: 81).

   Furthermore, for Kateb, just as the Algerian personality is not exclusively Arab or Amazigh, neither is it exclusively Muslim. He emphasizes that Abdelkader fought the Muslim Ottomans before he fought the Christian French. He describes Abdelkader as "the only shadow that could cover such an immense space, a man of the pen and the sword, the

only chief capable of uniting the tribes into a nation if the French hadn't come and cut short his efforts that were initially directed against the Turks" (96). Kateb is also critical of the mufti of Sétif for trying to stop the demonstrations on May 8, 1945, implying thereby that religious authorities were at times a hindrance to the revolutionary movement (52). It is also significant that in *Nedjma*, Rachid, who is obsessed with origins, never makes it to Mecca: his pilgrimage is cut short in Djeddah (109–16).

Thus, Kateb questions the wisdom of the search for origins on the part of some Algerian groups, even though he sought to show the longevity of the Algerian nation. For him, notions of primordial origin and ethnic purity are not only delusional, "we all have seen our origins blurred like a watercourse filled with sand" (91), but divisive and colonialist. The myth of ethnic purity was often used in colonial discourse to set up and maintain structures of inequality. The foolishness of the search for origins is shown through the failed pilgrimage to Mecca, of course, but most dramatically through Rachid's and Si Mokhtar's failure to return to the mystical Keblout tribe.[7]

The mixed character of the Algerian personality is symbolized by the mixed origins of Nedjma, whom Kateb describes as the daughter of a French, Jewish woman and whose father is either Sid Ahmed, Si Mokhtar, the puritan, or Rachid's father (97). However, Lella Fatma, who likes to brag, "skipping centuries," that she is a descendent of the prophet (97), has raised her. The complexity of Algeria is further symbolized by the complexity of Nedjma, whom Kateb describes in contradictory terms as "elegant" and "savage" (100), "dark almost black" (72), yet "her throat has the whiteness of foundries," her breasts are "huge and small" (77), she is "captive" (73), but she keeps those who want to isolate her in prison (62), dressed but "her dress is an additional nudity" (73). In the final analysis, what the search for the past in *Nedjma* foregrounds is that the Algerian nation has existed as will and a representation – an ideal of a unified nation and the determination to bring it about – since time immemorial, even though many attempts to give it concrete form before independence in 1962, notably those of Jugurtha (165) and Abdelkader (96), were destroyed in their infancy by outside forces.

Nedjma is, hence, both politically committed and formally innovative. It not only calls into question the traditional conception of history and the essentialist rhetoric of colonialism, but it also upsets the conventions of the novel. While Kateb wrote during the colonial period in Algeria and must be understood in the Algerian context of the 1950s,

he offers an important contribution to the reassessment of the connection between narrative techniques and the imposition of hegemonic structures. He shows that narrative techniques can serve or challenge established discursive power relations. This makes him a significant precursor of postmodern thought, where ethics and pragmatism replace ontology.

Notes

1. In addition to marginalizing Algerian culture, colonialism also distorted the Algerian past. Anything in Algerian history that challenged the idea of a purely Latin Algeria and the French "civilizing mission" was systematically erased from history textbooks. Such books say little or nothing about the Amazigh (Berber) and Islamic heritage of the Maghreb. Worse, children were taught to say "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" (Our ancestors the Gauls).

2. In a number of European historical accounts, colonialism rescues the colonized people from poverty, ignorance, and servitude and sets them on a path to emancipation. A famous example of this attitude is offered by Karl Marx, who condemned the exploitation and mistreatment of colonized people. At the same time, he supported British domination of India and, by implication, colonialism by claiming that it is necessary to bring what he thought were backward societies to modernity, just as he deplored the suffering brought about by the development of capitalism in Europe, but saw the transition to capitalism as necessary and ultimately progressive (Marx 1978: 658).

3. All page references to Kateb's *Nedjma* are given as simple numbers in parenthesis.

4. As Steven Knapp explains, "Beyond the *causal* role they play in influencing people's dispositions, the narratives preserved by collective memory sometimes play a *normative* role – that is, they may in various ways provide criteria, implicit or explicit, by which contemporary models of action can be shaped or corrected, or even by which particular ethical or political proposals can be authorized or criticized. For convenience, I will speak of a narrative that possesses such normative status as bearing collective *authority*" (Knapp 1989: 123).

5. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Waugh 1984: 2).

6. The spiral structure of *Nedjma* has been noticed by, among others, Charles Bonn (1990), Karen Aurbakken (1986), and Frances Brahmi (1976).

7. Rachid's obsession with Nedjma and his desire to explore his identity spur him, along with Si Mokhtar, to abduct her and take her to Nadhor, the birthplace of the ancient Keblout tribe, from which they are all supposedly

descended. Upon arrival, they pitch a tent in a remote area. At one point, leaving Si Mokhtar asleep in the tent, Rachid and Nedjma take to the scrubland where Nedjma takes a bath – a kind of purification ritual – in a copper cauldron, while Rachid watches from behind a fig tree (179–81). Unbeknownst to them, a black man who pretends to be asleep is spying on both of them from behind another fig tree. Apprehensive, Rachid runs to the tent only to find that Si Mokhtar has suffered fatal wounds inflicted by the black man. The Keblout clan sequesters Nedjma and chases Rachid away in accordance with the ancestor's order: "Keblout has said to protect only his daughters. As for the wandering males, the ancestor Keblout has said, let them live like savages, in the mountains and the valleys, those who have not defended their land" (199).

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6

For Bread Alone: How Moroccan Literature Let the Subalterns Speak

Florian Kohstall

Morocco is often referred to as a country of paradoxes, as a country unlike the others of the Maghreb. Since the seventeenth century, it has been ruled by the Alaouite dynasty. It is the only country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that was not subjected to Ottoman rule, and it witnessed a shorter period of colonial rule than the rest of the Maghreb, the so-called French and Spanish "protectorate" (1912–56). The uniqueness of the country ranges from the reproduction of cultural authenticity to political stability. Deep social and economic contrasts have often found expression in the duality between *baladu-l-makhzan* (land of government) and *baladu-s-sība* (land of insolence) (Geertz 1973: 298), contrasts reproduced under French colonial rule in the distinction between "useful" and "useless" Morocco. Politically, the Moroccan nationalist movement was never able to gain control of the anti- and postcolonial struggle as a single political party. Under the hegemony of the monarchy and its network of supporters (the so-called *makhzan*), political parties could emerge and exist, but always on the premise of extensive pluralism. The Islamist current never became as strong as, for example, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, even if the country's current prime minister is a member of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD). Despite various reform efforts since the enthronement of King Mohamed VI in 1999, the country is still characterized by sharp social inequalities. In the United Nations Human Development Index 2012, Morocco is ranked 130th, mainly due to its high illiteracy. Much of the rural population still lives in a subsistence economy. In the MENA region, only Mauretania and Yemen rank lower.

In countries with high illiteracy, literature has always played a specific role. Tahar Ben Jelloun, famous for his novel *L'écrivain public* (The

Public Writer, 1995), has often referred to himself as a "public writer." Originally, a public writer was one who wrote and prepared official letters for those unable to read or write. Even today, public writers can be found at the entrances to the Medina (the old town) in Rabat and other Moroccan towns. On the other hand, ever since UNESCO proclaimed Marrakech's central Jamaa el Fna Square a "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" in 2001, there has been greater awareness worldwide that the oral is equal in status to written expression in Morocco. Low circulation numbers for newspapers[1] also indicate that literature in Morocco has always had elite status. This is especially true of "nationalist writing," such as the works of Mohamed Allal al-Fassi, the first leader of the nationalist Istiqlal (Independence) Party, but it is also largely true of the emergence and development of the Moroccan novel.

However, it is important to note that the literature of the country has always sought to give the marginalized and subaltern a voice. In fact, contemporary Moroccan literature in particular both reflects and is shaped by this characteristic. Over the last decade, many novels have been published that address the country's social and economic inequalities. Additionally, topics formerly considered taboo have, since the accession of Mohamed VI, been widely covered in the literary output of the country.

In this chapter, I argue that Moroccan national identity is shaped not only by the writings of well-known nationalist authors such as Allal al-Fassi and Abdallah Laroui, but also by the literature on the subaltern.[2] This is especially true if we view literature as something universal that shapes the view of a given society from within and without. It is in this perspective that the preoccupation with the living conditions of subaltern groups reflects the country's identity and its image. Books such as Mohamed Choukri's *For Bread Alone* (1973) have long been considered as harmful to the public (Ezli 2010). Explicit descriptions of different forms of sexuality and drug use led to the book being banned from the shelves in Morocco until King Mohammed VI acceded. Books belonging to this genre certainly do not contribute to official nationalist discourse. Rather, they act as counter-narratives, since they portray the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in homogenous narratives of national identity. However, they largely shape the way Moroccans and non-Moroccans perceive the country.

I further argue that this type of counter-narrative has a crucial place in the evolution of the Moroccan novel. In Morocco, as in most other Arab countries, the novel is a relatively new genre, dating to the beginning

of the twentieth century. Many Moroccan novels can be considered exile or migrant literature, since they were written and published in France, where authors did not encounter the constraints of censorship (Eickelman 2003), publication, and distribution, which they did back home. As a result, for a long time the French language and French publishing houses dominated contemporary Moroccan literature. However, the development of this counter-narrative seems closely linked to the political, economic, and social context of Morocco. In fact, all three novels discussed below are representative of a particular turning point in the political history of the kingdom, and the way in which national identity was worked and reworked in the literature. They certainly appeared on the market without being a direct product of a political juncture, yet all of them reflect the ambiguity of the national discourse of their time.

The three novels that the chapter focuses upon are, first, Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* (The Simple Past, 1954), which portrays the shattered identity of a young French-educated Moroccan and his struggle with the values of his father and his country's political elite at the peak of the anti-colonial struggle, just two years before Morocco's independence in 1956. Second, Mohamed Choukri's *For Bread Alone* (1973), published first in English and later in Arabic as *Al-khubz al- hāfī* (1982), which is a brutal depiction of the author's own childhood on the streets of Tangier and Tetouan. While the story relates to the time of the Spanish "protectorate," the book was written and published during the reign of Hassan II. The third novel is Mahi Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* (literally, the stars/angels of Sidi Moumen, 2010),[3] which narrates the life of street children in Casablanca's largest slum, and their transformation into suicide bombers during the era of political relaxation under Mohamed VI, on the one hand, and the global War on Terror on the other.

All three novels triggered national and international controversy and debate and at least to some extent scandalized the political establishment. They also focus on social strata widely excluded from the intellectual and political discourses prevalent at the time they were written. Closer examination of these three novels illustrates how the preoccupation with the subaltern evolved and how it was linked to the political context of the time of publication. After briefly exploring the novels, I discuss how they represent the political developments of their time. I also show how the first two influenced the third and most recent novel to demonstrate how literature on the subaltern has evolved in Morocco.

Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*

Driss Chraïbi (1927–2007) is considered one of the fathers of the Moroccan novel. His first novel, *Le passé simple* (1954), banned in Morocco until 1977, earned him both strong criticism by Moroccan nationalist leaders and high literary plaudits in France. *Le passé simple*, and at least three of his subsequent books, *Les boucs* (Butts, 1955), *Succession ouverte* (Heirs to the Past, 1962), and *Vu, lu et entendu: mémoires* (lit. seen, heard, and understood: memoirs, 1998), draw deeply on his own life. Chraïbi was the son of a Moroccan tea trader. After attending a Koranic school, he continued his studies in a French *lycée* and later, after migrating to France, studied chemistry before abandoning his studies and dedicating himself to writing.

Le passé simple revolves around three central figures: the father, referred to as *Le Seigneur* (The Lord), who represents power and a patriarchal style of life; the mother, who takes upon herself all the sufferings of the family and the country; and the son, Driss Ferdi, who seems to be in permanent revolt against his father and the political and social elite of his home country. Driss Ferdi is formed in a French school. He is born into the small rising Moroccan elite that benefited from French colonialism, and could progress from the traditional Koranic schools to French schools usually reserved for the country's administrative elite. In opposition to his feudal, religious, and conservative father, Driss is literate and well educated. He wears European attire and denigrates his father's lifestyle. Wearing a tie becomes one of the symbols of his struggle against his father, who still dresses in the traditional Moroccan *jallābiyya* and *barbūsh*. In his rebellion against his father, Driss reflects on French philosophy and literature and on French political ideals such as syndicalism. At the same time, he speaks out about colonial injustice and the plight of the underprivileged in Morocco.

The author was criticized by many nationalists of playing the enemy's card at a crucial time in Moroccan history, but the novel is first and foremost about an individual struggle, with all its contradictions; about a person curious and eager to learn, who refuses to accept the homogenous construct of nationalism suggested by many of the political and intellectual elite. *Le passé simple* is, in fact, a counter-narrative to official conceptions of nationalism, and aims at reconciling the quest for modernization with the country's history and Islamic religious identity. This becomes especially evident when the book is compared with other Moroccan novels of the time. In his analysis of *Le passé simple* and Abdelkrim Ghallab's *Dafannā al-māḍī* (We Buried the Past, 1966), Said

Graiouid argues that both construct different models of public space. In *Le passé simple,* the protagonist Driss Ferdi dreams of an emancipatory and liberating public sphere, of "some people there to whom he can say a few words and who will listen to him" (cited in Graiouid 2008: 151–2). Through the protagonist, the author engages in a radical monologue, which often verges on cynicism, in which he sets out to find a middle way between what he calls "Oriental lethargy" and "Occident's insomnia" (Chraïbi 1954: 23). He rejects the way of life of his antecedents, mainly personified in the figure of his father, and admits he has committed himself to the way of life of the colonizer. While he claims to be Moroccan, he especially criticizes the unreflective cultural expressions of Islam practiced by the bourgeoisie in his home country at a time when Moroccan nationalists are engaged in an anti-colonial struggle.

In contrast to Chraïbi's shattered identity between Orient and Occident, Ghallab's novel is set in a *riyāḍ*, a structured, traditional Moroccan house with an open courtyard that represents a world of harmony and tolerance. The world of the subservient black servants is a dark room in a corner of the house. The main protagonist, Aberrahmane, falls in love with a French settler woman, who represents for him the world of beauty and sensitivity. Out of loyalty to his homeland and its history, he decides not to marry her because she is "from outside the walls of the medina" and "he himself belongs to the past" (cited in Graiouid 2008: 152). Abderrahmane joins a resistance cell in the anti-colonial struggle, while his half-brother – born of a relationship between his father and a servant – becomes a judge in a colonial court. Clearly portrayed as a traitor to the national cause, the half-brother dies in a car accident. Ghallab constructs in his novel a more homogenous and consensual public space, in which different characters oppose one another and different parts of society have clearly separated identities (Graiouid 2008). Through the main protagonist's tentative attempts to reproduce the harmony of the past and the old precolonial order, Ghallab's novel represents a type of narrative much more in keeping with the ideals of the nationalist struggle than Chraïbi's *Le passé simple.*

Despite Chraïbi's strong criticism of traditional Moroccan values, reading his book as only anti-national would be too limited. In the fifth chapter, not only the father's shortcomings but also his finer qualities are portrayed. Driss rediscovers his love for his father, a theme that recurs in a subsequent novel, *Succession ouverte*, when the emigrant Driss returns from France after his father's death. At this stage, the protagonist engages again in a dialogue with his father, which is also a dialogue between his own life in France and the destiny of his homeland, where

the "succession is open." While identity in *Le passé simple* and Chraïbi's other novels sharply contrasts with less differentiated constructions of public space and national identity, their characters struggle for distinctiveness can also be perceived as a struggle for Morocco's postcolonial future. Their struggles are not just individual, but also for a whole country.

Mohamed Choukri's *For Bread Alone*

Mohammed Choukri's (1935–2003) autobiographical *For Bread Alone* (2010 [1973]) was written in 1967, but not published in its original Arabic form until 1982, only to be banned a year later from Moroccan bookshelves. The English edition of 1973 was an adaptation by Paul Bowles, who encouraged Choukri to dictate the text to him in Spanish and Moroccan dialect. Despite, or maybe because of its proscription, it counts as one of the most widely read Moroccan novels, second only to Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sacred Night* (2008). The author narrates his life from the time his family flees a famine in the Rif Mountains until his confinement in prison at the age of 20, when he decides to learn how to read and write. Set during the era of Spanish colonial rule in northern Morocco, the story revolves around his anger toward his tyrannical and cruel father, his struggle for survival in the streets of Tangier and Tetouan, his daily confrontation with death, and his constant recourse to drugs and prostitution as some sort of antidote to physical starvation.

Considered by some as emblematic of a literature "when the subaltern speaks" (Ghazoul 1999), the novel is also regarded as a sort of continuous breaking of taboos. This, however, may not have been the author's intention: the explicit, cruel descriptions of various forms of sexuality and their imaginaries serve the author as a kind of shelter from the father's beatings, and the selling of his body is a way to guarantee his own survival. In the Morocco of Hassan II, the novel was considered scandalous. Public revelation of sexuality was unacceptable and "the representation of misery is more destabilizing for a society than the actual existence of such misery" (Ezli 2010: 462). As Salah Natij remarks: "We accept that there is prostitution on the streets, but we do not accept that a literary character prostitutes himself. Prostitution in the street is simply a fact, prostitution in literature becomes a cause" (Natij 1990, cited in Ezli 2010: 462).

While Choukri denied writing anything against the political regime of Hassan II, he later in *Streetwise* (2007 [1992]) distanced himself from

apolitical literature. With regard to the writings of one of his friends, the author Mohamed al-Sabbagh, he says: "I don't know how to write about the touches of angelic beauty, the grapes of dew, and the paralysis of hunting dogs, and the songs of nightingales. I don't know how to write with a broom of crystal in my head. A broom is protest and not decoration" (cited in Ezli 2010: 463). This type of attitude toward a literature where the beauty of the word is used to describe a world in harmony stems not from ideological conviction or political partisanship, but is rather the protest of an individual who endured misery. Having learnt to write and discovered the force of writing, Choukri wants to express himself and let his own misery speak. In this sense, Choukri's book also embodies that element of desire Adrianne Rich describes as a fundamental element of art:

> Behind all art is an element of desire … Love of life, of existence, love of another human being, love of human beings is in some way behind all art – even the most angry, even the darkest, even the most grief-stricken, and even the most embittered art has that element somewhere behind it. Because how could you be so despairing, so embittered, if you had not had something you loved that you lost?[4]

The allegedly most disturbing fact – and probably the reason Choukri's text is considered off-limits by political and religious authorities and certain Arabic literary circles – is that this desire is never made explicit. The fates of the narrator and those one would consider close to him are often described without the least enthusiasm or sympathy. There are no regrets when the author's brother dies and there is no reconciliation whatever between Choukri and his brutal father. The only escape from misery is the art of writing itself. In prison, Choukri says to one of his fellows: "You are happy … Because you know how to read and write" (Choukri 2010: 182). Without much explanation, he asserts his fellow's superiority. Another passage describes a verbal dispute between him and some intellectuals in a street café, a dispute that underscores his determination to relate his own story without adopting the posture and way of life of the intellectual. In presenting his characters, Choukri ornaments them with nothing other than their own miserable lives. Unlike Naguib Mahfouz and other authors, who often dwell on the same type of misery, Choukri's characters are simply there, neither good nor bad, but described in their naked, stranded existence.[5] Of the Arabic text, Ferial J. Ghazoul explains:

> The entire work…is an exfoliation, a literary play on the multiple and ambivalent shades of meaning latent in a triliteral Arabic root verb *harama* (to deprive/to prohibit) which gives rise to such commonly-known derivations as *harem* and *ihtiram* (respect). The essential replay is, to my mind, between *haram* (taboo) and *hurman* (dispossession), both related to denial…I believe Choukri's message is that there is an interconnection between the two, and that ultimately one can bring oneself out of this circular hell, just as the "living come out of the dead…out of the rotten and the disintegrated," as he says in his introduction to a 1982 edition of this work.
>
> (Ghazoul 1999)[6]

This observation highlights not only the subtlety of the Arabic in the book, but also the fact that the text has undergone sensitive changes in English translation. The play on the root verb *ḥarama,* for example, is less evident in Bowles's adaptation, widely circulated before the text was finally published in Arabic. Bowles's translation certainly contributed to the success of Choukri and his international recognition. *For Bread Alone* shaped the international image of Morocco as an underdeveloped, Third World country. In the 1970s and 1980s, this was, of course, an extremely sensitive point for the country's political elites, because their legitimacy depended on social and economic development and its success.

When the Arabic edition of the novel was published in 1982, Moroccan Minister of Interior Driss Basri forbade it on the recommendation of the ʿulamāʾ. The religious authorities were scandalized by the open expressions of sexuality and constant references to drug abuse. In addition, the prohibition coincided with Hassan II's continuing attempts to consolidate his power and integrate the political opposition – the nationalist Istiqlal Party and the leftist *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) – and religious bodies – the ʿulamāʾ and Islamist movements – into the political arena under his authority. In this political context, when censorship was still widespread in Morocco, the publication of the Arabic translation of *For Bread Alone*, *Al-khubz al-hāfī*, was disturbing. Hassan II not only had to please the moral entrepreneurs, he was also extremely reluctant to countenance a book describing the misery in Morocco's northern territories. After brutally suppressing the Rif rebellion in 1958–59 before he acceded to the throne, he never set foot in the region.

Choukri himself rejected the idea that his book was banned for religious or political reasons, but attributed this to the criticisms of his

father. Indeed, his autobiographical account, unlike Chraïbi's *The Sim-ple Past*, contains no discussion of the political context of the time. The story is set in the Spanish protectorate, but there is little in the narrative that connects with the wider world, apart from peripheral involvement in the 1952 upheaval in Tangier against colonial rule. Choukri himself is only an observer of this upheaval and is – despite his involvement in smuggling – imprisoned because of a dispute with a drunk. His pros-titution, drug use, and smuggling occur in a protectorate that many considered decadent, and his delinquencies seem to be rather the rule than the exception there. The novel is, however, a fierce critique of a tyrannical father, whom he wishes dead before his time (Choukri 2010). This critique is also a strong attack on the role of religion in Morocco's traditional society. In one of his disputes, Choukri brands his father "the messenger of Allah" (Choukri 2010: 84), rather as Chraïbi referred to Driss Ferdi's father as "Le Seigneur."

Mahi Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen*

Both Chraïbi and Choukri set the stage for the novel in which those who do not have a voice are allowed to speak. Chraïbi does this in more holistic terms, from the perspective of an intellectual, while Choukri engages us in the misery of the subaltern and of a stratum of Moroccan society completely excluded from intellectual and national discourse. *For Bread Alone* is less preoccupied with identity issues than Chraibi's *Le passé simple* and Ghallab's *Dafannā al-māḍī* (We Buried the Past, 1966). It is rather the portrait of an individual's struggle for pure sur-vival. This theme is equally apparent in more recent Moroccan novels, including Mahi Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* (2010). In this novel, the life of six street children is portrayed, as is their transfor-mation into suicide bombers. The backdrop to the novel is the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca that killed 40 people and left hundreds injured. The attacks shocked a kingdom that had long been portrayed as a haven of political stability, and which now, under Mohamed VI, was also seen as a "model of reform" in North Africa (Malka and Alterman 2006).

Mahi Binebine, born in 1959, is a famous Moroccan painter who lived in Paris and New York before returning to Morocco. In *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* he tells of six children in Morocco's largest *bidonville* (slum) on the outskirts of Casablanca through the voice-off of one of the children who has just blown himself up in the attack. The boy tries to understand through the narrative how all of them ended up as suicide bombers. The

children grow up in their miserable homes and at the nearby garbage dump, which is their playground. The common, universal theme that for a long time brings them together and forges their identity and relationships is football. One day, an extremist religious preacher[7] enters their circle. He seduces them through the obligation to strict behavior and the promise of paradise. Progressively, the preacher, named Abu Subair, alienates one boy after the other from his previous life characterized by brutal day-to-day violence. Through a process of conversion that severs their remaining links with their families, through holidays in pleasant settings, the boys slowly get ready for what they call "The Great Jump": they blow themselves up in one of Casablanca's luxury hotels in order to reach the promised paradise. Paradise, however, remains an illusion. In the final passage, the protagonist describes himself and his fellows as puppeteers seduced by Satan, despite their prayers. As they trigger their explosive devices, they see only devastation:

> The firework took its course and killed survivors and saviors alike and spread chaos and desperation . . . They [the victims] mourned in different languages, but their tears did not have nationalities. . . . Yes, we achieved our goals, probably even beyond expectation. Abu Subair, Emir Said and his fellows no doubt were rubbing their hands in glee . . . But we were dead, really dead. And we still expect the stars to come.
>
> (Binebine 2011: 143, my translation
> from the German edition)

Binebine's novel touches on the topics of politics, religion, and violence. However, it is largely free of ideological charge. It also avoids discussion of the political and religious context. Except for a short depiction of high-class living compounds and luxury hotels, where Europeans and new middle-class Moroccans live, there is little problematization of the "other" in the novel. At the same time, the world of the street children is described as a world on its own:

> A passer-by could walk past our area, without witnessing its [the slum's] existence. High walls separate the area from the boulevard, where the daily traffic makes a hell of a noise. In these walls, you could find small openings like narrow arrow slits, through which you could observe the other world.
>
> (Binebine 2011: 7, my translation
> from the German edition)

Through its sensitive and empathetic style of writing, Binebine's novel evokes great sympathy in the reader toward the kids of this slum, despite their final destiny. Especially by introducing their way of life through one of their numbers, the cruel bomber suddenly becomes a fellow citizen of the world, incapable of resisting the forces out there. As such, the novel, by taking up the theme of the subaltern, contrasts sharply with *For Bread Alone,* which often repels the reader with its explicit descriptions of sexuality and misery.

From postcolonial novel to *littérature du monde*

Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* is to an extent representative of a new trend in the Moroccan novel. It is part of a whole body of literature that debates subjects that were taboo during the reign of Hassan II, from books tackling state violence in the Years of Lead and exposing the crimes in Tazmamart prison to authors discussing the condition of women and of street children. Over the past ten years, numerous novels have been published in Morocco that address the country's social questions and focus on the marginalized and on social outsiders (see Orlando 2009). This novelistic mushrooming has taken place in a new political context. When Mohamed VI acceded to the throne in 1999, in his very first speech he presented himself as "the king of the poor." Through a set of reforms such as the law on personal status, the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission and finally with the launching of the National Human Development Initiative, he tried to distinguish himself from the political legacy of his father. While these policies did not always lead to improvement in individual living conditions, they set the stage for new discourses on the poor and the subaltern. King Mohamed VI's new social policies led to the involvement of most political parties and numerous researchers in the decision-making process in order to reach consensus on the nation's most pressing development issues, thereby depoliticizing Morocco's political arena and co-opting the country's intelligentsia (Kohstall 2010). While Hassan II presided over an autocratic regime that prioritized economic development at the expense of political liberties, Mohamed VI has adopted the language of the international donor community and Morocco now portrays itself as a "country in reform," needing time and money to guarantee social cohesion. Under these circumstances, depictions of misery are much less taboo than during the time of Choukri and Hassan II.

   Of course, the Moroccan novel's preoccupation with the social question and the subaltern is not new, but it has changed in style. Valery

Orlando, in her account of the new *littérature du monde*, identifies several characteristics of the new Moroccan novels published since the late 1990s. In her view, contemporary writers are less preoccupied with the past and the narratives of earlier generations: "Their narratives are not the Marxist-revolutionary ones of yore as written by Abdellatif Laâbi or Abraham Serfaty. Nor are they the metaphorically rebellious prose of Driss Chraïbi as depicted most notably in *Le passé simple*" (Orlando 2009: 369). A new humanism has characterized the post-1990s novel. While contemporary authors continue to address the pressing issues of society and write for the poor and *les petits gens*, their aspiration is to depict these poor people as part of a globalized world. Additionally, there is a shift from the old *topoi* of French colonialism to a new type of economic domination exerted mainly through international financial institutions and their profiteers among the Makhzen:

> Authors draw their readers attention to the squeeze of the average Moroccan, meted out by the World Bank, the IMF, Peace Corps, NGOs, USAID and the eight-year Bush regime. Operating as a social-realist, the author challenging socio-political abuse seeks to expose the *roumis* [rūmī – Europeans] and their cohort Moroccan authorities for what and whom they are: "the ball-crushers," of "les petites gens."

> (Orlando 2009: 369)

This new humanism and a narrative liberated from the past are well represented in Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen*. Especially in relation to Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*, the novel is less preoccupied with identity issues. In contrast to Choukri's *For Bread Alone,* Binebine's children evoke the reader's sympathy, not revulsion. Binebine's novel in fact marks a shift from more essentialist conceptions of national and religious identity toward a more cosmopolitan or universalistic conception of "citizen of the (under)-world." This evolution can be observed in the novel's protagonists, but also in the portraits of the father figure. Prominent in all three novels, the father evolves from patriarch (Chraïbi) to tyrant (Choukri) and finally to a weakish person on the margins of the narrative (Binebine).

Despite this evolution, all three novels show some recurrent patterns, from the critique of the popular or radical use of religion to the triangular relationship between protagonist, father, and mother. This latter seems in fact to be a recurrent theme more generally in the Moroccan novel. Within this relationship, the father often represents religious or

political authority and is the object of debate, while the main focus is the protagonist, with his shattered identity (Chraïbi) or in his misery (Choukri and Binebine). In short, the evolution of the novel seems to reflect the changing political context rather than a rupture between postcolonial literature and *littérature du monde*. The three novels discussed here are a mirror to the evolution of Morocco's political life from nationalist struggle to autocratic rule and then to the age of reform under Mohamed VI.

Recurrence of the subaltern in the Moroccan novel

Abdelkébir Khatibi wrote that the novel in the Maghreb "translates the profound transformation of society" (Khatibi 1968). The emergence of the novel in this region largely corresponds with the struggle for national liberation. This first wave mainly portrayed local societies as they are as a way of telling the reader: "*voilà ce que nous sommes, voici comment nous vivons*" (look at how we are, look at how we are living). From its very beginning, the novel was also a medium of communicating with the outsider, at this time the *colon*, and to confront him in his own language (French) with a more nuanced reality, a reality that the *colon* was trying to suppress or to construct differently. Very quickly, however, the novel began to shift from this type of self-portrait toward critical self-reflection, so well expressed in Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*, where the protagonist struggles to come to terms with both Occidental and Oriental lifestyles and ideas.

One could update Khatibi's assessment of the evolving Moroccan novel by including Choukri and Binebine within its scope, the first as a shift toward the critique of autocratic rule and the latter as a problematization of Morocco's new political order under Mohamed VI, in which forces of globalization exacerbate the gap between rich and poor. As noted, Choukri himself refused to interpret his autobiography as political manifesto, but the book became probably one of the most political in the whole corpus of Moroccan literature. The exposure of the country's misery in the form of poverty and prostitution resonated with the social reality of many Moroccans in the 1970s and 1980s so well that it directly confronted Hassan II and his discourse on the monarchy as the only legitimate representative of the nation. Its critique of religion indirectly exposed one of the pillars of the king's legitimacy, namely, his role as "commander of the faithful." While one should probably not overstate the reasons for the prohibition of the book, the text certainly conflicted with Hassan II's interests to unite different political forces

under the monarchy and impose upon them a consensus fabricated by the palace.

From this perspective, both Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* and Choukri's *For Bread Alone* act as counter-narratives to official conceptions of nationalism of the time. Binebine's novel, by contrast, is more a critique of the global economic system than Morocco's domestic politics. In fact, the novel mainly aims to confront a dominant global discourse on terrorism and the War on Terror, which frames the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and in Casablanca in 2003 in religious and ideological terms, such as "Arabs against the West." Compared with the other two novels, the setting and framing of the subaltern have changed. One observes, in fact, the emergence of a new kind of subaltern, living in his own world but also constantly interacting with the world outside and its conflicts (such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, transmitted to the slum kids on the television screen). The outside world is no longer made up of the French or Spanish colonizer, but by diffuse forces of injustice produced by the world outside. But Binebine's *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* also contains a subtle critique of Morocco's official domestic political discourse by exposing the disappointing results of Mohammed VI's social policies. Commenting on his novel, the author says:

> With this novel I wanted to show that the religious mafia is responsible for what had happed ... The state is also responsible as it allows these slums to exist. Responsible are also the rich – and I am one of them – who exploit their fellow citizens. These children are in fact victims for me. Yes they have killed and they are suicide bombers, that is bad, but finally they are victims.
>
> (Cited in Binebine 2011: 150)

From this perspective, Binebine could also be called a "public writer" in Ben Jelloun's sense. Through the voice-off of one of the bombers, he again "lets the subalterns speak." He reworks the dominant discourse since the September 2001 terrorist attacks based on the logic of hatred and engages with the universe of lost souls who are easily converted into suicide bombers. Very much like *For Bread Alone,* the novel is largely free from ideological debates on nation and religion. The national symbolism still markedly present in Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* has been replaced by the symbolism of cosmopolitanism. The opposition is no more that between the French and Moroccan way of life, but between the hardships of daily life and a type of hegemonic world

order and an enemy difficult to grasp in this time of globalization and reform.

Notes

1. In 2005, circulation stood at 13 copies sold per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to an average of 55 in Arab countries and 285 in France. See http://riadzany. blogspot.com/2006/02/moroccos-newspapers-13-copies-per-1000.html (last accessed September 27, 2014).
2. By 'subaltern,' I draw on Gramsci's definition, namely those groups not having access to the realm of social hegemony. Like Asef Bayat (2012: 9), I count among such groups in the Middle East the poor, youth, women, and the politically marginalized, depending, of course, on historical and political context.
3. The German version, which is used in this chapter, is published under the title *Die Engel von Sidi Moumen* (2011). There is also an English translation published under the title *Horses of God* (2013).
4. See http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/12/14/adrienne-rich-on-love-loss-happiness-creativity/ (last accessed September 27, 2014).
5. The argument that Arabic literature should express beauty and virtue instead of misery and human suffering became especially evident in *Al-khubz al-ḥāfī* crisis in Egypt. After complaints by parents, the American University in Cairo withdrew Choukri's book from its teaching syllabus. In their letter of complaint, parents accused the professor concerned of exposing students to a book that was "far from the principles of Arabic literature, he [Choukri] is talking about his dirty life, that is of no interest for anybody" (cited in Mehrez 2010: 247). Interestingly, the university administration's acceptance of the parents' arguments and final decision to remove the book from its curriculum provoked major controversy in Arab and international literary circles. While many defended Choukri's text as a major contribution to Arab literature, some colleagues of concerned professor viewed the teaching of Choukri's text in English as legitimate, but disapproved of the teaching of it in Arabic (Mehrez 2010).
6. The derivations of *harama* (*ḥarama*) are transliterated as follows: *harem* (*ḥarīm*), *ihtiram* (*iḥtirām*), *haram* (*ḥarām*), and *hurman* (*ḥirmān*).
7. The political identity of this person and his group is never revealed by the author. The Salafiyya Jihādiyya group, with presumed links to Al-Qaida, was suspected of carrying out the Casablanca attack.

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7
Mahattat: "Stations" on the Road to the Libyan Nation

Tetz Rooke

It is 1945. The boy Kamel is ten years old. The war has just ended and the German and Italian troops have been expelled from his home town, Tripoli. It is a great day! For the first time the local school is opened to the legions of the Arab Muslim children. Previously it was reserved for the privileged of the city, the Italian and Jewish children,[1] but now the times are changing! In the schoolyard, a British major stands beside the headmaster and the local imam, who leads the Arab crowd in cheers to Great Britain, its king and queen, Churchill, Montgomery, and the allies, each in turn. To be able to attend school – what an adventure for inexperienced Libyan teachers and young pupils alike, boys who at best had learned to read and to write in Koranic school. Most of them had not.[2] They are just ragged street children drawn to school by the bread and cheese that is distributed free for lunch. The girls' time has yet to come.

Half a century later, Libyan writer, lawyer and politician Kamel Maghur [Kamil Hasan al-Maqhur] (1935–2002) vividly recalled this celebration in his literary autobiography, *Mahattat* (Stations 1995).[3] Here, in great detail, the author-narrator portrays his first experience of elementary school and gives it symbolic importance for the development of his country in a national trajectory that runs in parallel with his own life throughout the book. The story of Kamel's childhood and youth coincides, intersects, and intertwines with the story of the transformation of Italy's "Fourth Shore" into the independent nation-state of Libya.[4] The stations on the road are similar. In both stories the opening of the school marks the beginning of a new era, heralds the birth of a new consciousness in the protagonist and a new nation. When the local school opens its gates to Arabs, literally the doors toward the unknown are flung open. A new future awaits the headmaster, teachers, pupils, and their cheering

parents too. Together in this scene they assume the role of the people, the symbolic representation of modern Libya.

Literature is an important subject in any national education. As a central institution of culture, literature is exploited by cultural nationalists as a resource to create and maintain the nation (Jusdanis 2001). In many passages in Kamel Maghur's text, not least in those describing his schooling, literature is often a topic. But as part of the story of Libyan nation-building, this topic has paradoxical features. When the adult narrator remembers his former schoolteachers with fond nostalgia, both those that appeared in the classroom in the flesh and those who entered it, in his words, between the covers of a book, the most beloved of them is actually not Libyan but Egyptian, Taha Husayn, the visionary blind doyen of modern Arabic literature who wrote like nobody else despite his handicap. From the moment his biting and humorous childhood narrative *al-Ayyam* (The Days 1926) was introduced to the boys in fourth grade, literature became the aim of the students, the goal of the teachers, and the future of them all. From that moment on, Arabic literature, modern and classical, became the stuff that dreams were made of on both a personal and a collective level (al-Maqhur 1995: 128–9).

This passion for literature is one of the central themes of *Mahattat*. To the young protagonist, creative literature is a most wonderful discovery. It offers him a private escape from his frequent loneliness into a world of adventure and love, but also sensitizes him to social issues and politics at a time when nationalist discourse was dominant. Yet most of the literary models he is introduced to, both in and outside school, come, just like Taha Husayn, from Egypt, writers and critics such as Mustafa al-Manfaluti, Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, ʿAbbas al-ʿAqqad, Ibrahim al-Mazini, and Tawfiq al-Hakim. Moreover, the road that leads young Kamel to fame as a pioneer Libyan short story writer also goes through Egypt and Egyptian intellectual life.[5] After elementary school in Tripoli, he is sent, just like his older brothers before him, to Cairo by his father in order to complete his education. Thus, many of the "stations" on the author's personal journey to maturity and independence lie in the Egyptian capital of the late 1940s and early 1950s and not in Tripoli or even Libya. And, by implication, many of the stations on Libya's road toward nationhood are also to be found "abroad."

But if national literature primarily is defined by a common language, a common culture, common social concerns, and not by a common territory or polity, then the seeming paradox of a Libyan identity based on Egyptian literary imaginations is quickly resolved. It is explained by the unity of the Arabic language, the proximity of Libya and Egypt,

and the particular historical moment. In the period after World War II, it was above all language that designated the borders of the nation in the political thinking of the region (Kienle 1996: 164). Indeed, as Yasir Suleiman has pointed out about the role of the Arabic language in Arabic nationalism, one of the main themes in Arab nationalist discourse is the separation of nation and state. In ideological terms, the latter is not established as a precondition of the former. The state *may* enhance the cause of Arab nationalism, but does not enjoy the same status as language in nation-formation (Suleiman 2003: 163).

Kamel's youth was a time when the future Libyan state was still in the making. Nobody knew what it would look like. At the time, some nationalists in Tripoli even argued for a union between Tripolitania and Egypt as the best solution to the vexed question of independence, the author recalls. From their perspective, Libyan national literature must naturally include Egyptian writers too. National identity was a confusing issue to many people also on a practical level. With the defeat of Italy, old citizenships were lost and new ones created. Different military authorities issued different identity papers and travel documents valid in different regions. People were searching for a way out of the maze (al-Maqhur 1995: 156–7). The Libyan nation was uncharted territory.

Terra incognita

Libyan national literature was also an unknown land, and to some extent still is. With the possible exception of works by the eminent novelist Ibrahim al-Koni (b. 1948), creating magic desert stories inspired by the Tuareg people, modern Libyan literature in Arabic is largely unknown among Western readers, academics included.[6] Very little has been written in European languages on the subject and Libyan literature is *terra incognita* even among Western professional Arabists (Kilpatrick 2011). More surprisingly, in the Arab world Libyan literature seems to be largely unknown (Alkikli 2011: 44). What is more, even in the country itself, for reasons mentioned below, indigenous fiction has for long periods been hard to find (Chorin 2008: 9, 16, 23, 192–3).

Why, except for the works of al-Koni, is Libyan literature unknown in Western academia, except perhaps to a few Italian experts?[7] One likely reason is the force and persistence of colonial patterns. During the colonial period, Libya was "an Italian affair," and the colonial heritage matters in the postcolonial world: Libya was an Italian colony, not French or British, and the less dominant Italian language served as the vehicle for administration and control. Another reason is the narrow

scope of modern Libyan fiction compared to that in other Arab countries, not least Egypt. The literary output is comparatively small and its history short and ruptured. In fact, Libyan fiction is nearly as young as the state itself, whose independence was proclaimed in December 1951. Immediately after the war when education was opened up and Kamel and his Arab friends in Tripoli were admitted to school, there were hardly any Libyan works for them to read! According to some, the first Libyan novel appeared as late as 1961 (Sakkut 2000, II: 368 and VI: 3644),[8] in 1970 according to others (Diana 2008: 105).[9] "Up until the mid-1980s any talk of something called 'The Libyan novel' could be considered boastful exaggeration, belonging more to the realm of wishful thinking than embodying a tangible reality" (Ahmidan 2011: 46). Ibrahim al-Fagih likewise concluded that "there was little of significance in the fields of the novel and drama" when he embarked on a study of Libyan prose writings in the early 1980s (al-Fagih 1983: 2).[10] These frank statements are corroborated by bibliographical statistics. Egyptian literary historian Hamdi Sakkut lists only 40 Libyan novels by some 20 writers in his large bibliography of the Arabic novel from 1865 to 1995. Those 40 books seem to represent the complete national output in the genre until then (Sakkut 2000, I and VI: 3644–8).[11]

Seen from such a vantage point, the seminal role of the novel in national identity-formation as theorized by Benedict Anderson (1991) is not easily recognized in Libya. That is, unless you expand the notion of the nation to cover both the civic-political nation within the boundaries of the sovereign state and the cultural-ethnic nation often associated with Pan-Arabism.[12] Anderson does mention "Arab nationalism" as a parallel to other nationalisms (Greek, Romanian, Russian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Finish, Norwegian, Afrikaner, Turkish, etc.) born between 1820 and 1920. And he points to the central and ideological importance of national print-languages for the emergence of the modern nation, in this case Arabic (Anderson 1991: 72–82). However, he does not discuss the historical experience of any particular Arab country or analyse the impact of any Arabic text on the national imaginations of readers.

If it is impossible to separate culture from politics in the nation-state building project, as Jusdanis argues (2001: 154–5), then in Libya it is actually the short story rather than the novel that has served as a vehicle for political debate and nationalist expression. In the 1950s and up to the Libyan revolution of 1969, it was the short story that offered a platform for narrative discourse and provided a readership. In the pre-Internet age, it was in the committed short story, often published in the press, that young people found inspiration for change, images that

moved them to action and imaginative texts that welded the nation together in the narrow territorial sense. One of the first collections of short stories from Libya was *al-Qasas al-qawmi* (National Stories), published in Cairo in1958. This book is remarkable both for its declared nationalistic purpose and for the fact that its author was a woman "in the days when a Libyan woman could hardly dream of participating in any form of public life, let alone in the literary field" (al-Fagih 1983: 101).[13]

But even if the seeds were apparently there from the beginning, with something of a literary boom in the mid-1960s (Chorin 2008: 192), subsequent political developments did not help the growth of Libyan creative writing. Instead, for decades, Moammar Gaddafi's authoritarian rule hampered literary development. To be an independent, free writer under Gaddafi was well-nigh impossible inside the country. In April 1973, the Libyan leader proclaimed a Libyan "Cultural Revolution." Books with "imported ideas" that threatened to seduce the youth were to be burned. Panels of appointed "Libyan writers" were established all over the country to examine and decide whether tens of thousands of books in university libraries, cultural centers, and schools were culturally or spiritually valuable or not. If not, they were to be destroyed. Student committees likewise censored textbooks, combed libraries for "subversive ideas" and aimed to purge the curriculum of anti-Islamic and anti-Arabic content (Rydberg 1975: 262–3; Mansfield 1982: 462–3).

Individual freedom of expression was harshly suppressed by the regime. Dissident views were considered a threat to the unity of the people. A few committed writers with the means fled the country and those who stayed kept their writing a private hobby more or less (Chorin 2008: 192). This is clearly reflected in Sakkut's bibliography: there were no Libyan novels published between the announcement of the Cultural Revolution in 1973 and 1980. The xenophobic cleansings of the 1970s were followed by new book burnings during the next decade too. In her short story "The Pools and the Piano," Najwa Binshatwan (b. 1970) recounts her experience of this anti-intellectual climate, symbolized by the black ashes left after the burning of foreign-language books in the 1980s. No wonder then that Libyan literature is unknown outside its borders. It would be a gross understatement to say that the political situation in Libya after the 1969 revolution was not supportive of art and literature. Many writers were arrested, others stopped writing. And the previously flourishing short story withered and died (Alkikli 2011: 45).

Fragile national identity

Does it even exist today, Libyan national identity? In the present post-revolutionary moment, Libyan identity seems to be as fragile, fractured, and shaky as the Libyan state itself (Sawani 2012). Historically, Libya consists of three distinct regions or "countries" that are independent of each other: Tripolitania in the west, Cyrenaica in the east, and Fezzan in the south. Each has its own character and the geographical distances are enormous. It was the Italians who, after a brutal colonial war that reduced the Bedouin population in Cyrenaica alone by half to two-thirds between 1911 and 1932 (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 191), linked these areas within the framework of a single state.

After independence, the new Libyan state was established as a federal monarchy with three provincial centers, Tripoli, Benghazi, and Sebha, and two federal capitals, Benghazi and Tripoli. On top of this there were four different governments. This federal system reflected the historical disunity of the country. It was a product of the United Nations and soon proved unworkable (Wright 2010: 173, 178). However, its founding logic has visibly resurfaced after the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and the latest revolution. Once more the flag of Libya is the flag of 1951, and with it old regional tensions and competition between local identities have again come to the fore.

The political situation after 2011, characterized by internal strife and power struggles along tribal lines, in some ways resembles the situation when the state was established. In the immediate postwar period too there were many competing ideas about how the former colony should be ruled, who should do it, and where the borders should be drawn. To the generation of Libyans who grew up then it was a turbulent time of great transformations. In Kamel Maghur's short stories from the 1950s and 1960s, this political strife is made into literature. In "Qalb al-Madina" (The Heart of the City), for example, the protagonist is a poor young man who has left his neighborhood gang of criminal friends to become a policeman. After finishing his training, he returns home in uniform hoping to marry his old sweetheart next door. He has changed, but has she? Change is a key word in the story. All the characters are involved in choosing sides in different conflicts. Society is changing and individuals have to respond. The setting is Tripoli in 1949. Everywhere in the city people are talking politics. Strikes, demonstrations, and outbreaks of violence form a backdrop to the characters' inner lives. The story ends with a huge demonstration against the so-called Bevin-Sforza plan that proposed Italian trusteeship over Tripolitania.[14] Bu Bakr, the

protagonist, is ordered out with his unit to break up the demonstration and assault the demonstrators. However, when he sees the faces of his old friends among the crowd and one of them falls to a police bullet, his old identity and solidarity take over. He rebels against his orders and lets his baton fall on the head of a police officer instead. The story ends with his joining in the shouts of the masses: "Down with Bevin! Down with colonialism!" (al-Maqhur n.d.: 131).

Short stories like this, written in a social realist style, earned Maghur the reputation of being one of the best writers of his generation.[15] He started publishing stories in the monthly *Tarabulus al-Gharb* in the late 1950s (al-Fagih 1983: 131; Diana 2008: 77–8). His first book was the collection *14 Qissa min Madinati* (14 Stories from My City 1965), which included texts previously published in this magazine. It was followed by *al-Ams al-Mashnuq* (The Strangled Yesterday 1968), which contains the short story "The Heart of the City." But with the Libyan revolution of 1969, Maghur stopped publishing. Instead he pursued a judicial and diplomatic career inside the regime, serving in many important posts: Libya's UN representative, 1972; OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) chairman, 1983; minister of foreign affairs, 1986; head of the Libyan delegation in the Lockerbie affair and chief of the Libyan defense team during the trial, 1998, to mention just a few. It was not until he retired in 1995 that he made his literary comeback with *Mahattat,* followed by the short story collection *Hikayat min al-Madina al-Bayda'* (Stories from the White City, 1997) and some other works.[16]

Emotions and language

In his autobiography, Maghur returns to the Tripoli of his youth in the 1940s and early 1950s. The author grew up in the poor neighborhood of al-Dahra. He describes the city's inhabitants as a mixture of Arabs, Italians, Maltese, and Jews. It was a racially segregated environment with sharp divisions between the groups, both physically in terms of quarters and socially in terms of occupation and modes of living. The Arabs were the poorest and most discriminated against, particularly by the Italians. The author illustrates the level of poverty by referring to the products sold on the local market: fried locusts and tobacco gathered from cigarette butts on the ground. The only education available to Arab children was the Koranic school, and the only work available to their fathers and mothers was manual and menial work as day laborers (al-Maqhur 1995: 39–42, 62–3, 87–9).

Kamel Maghur came from a family of traders and religious scholars, so he was better off. Nevertheless, he begins his book by expressing his wonder at the fact that he ever found a ticket out of this constrained environment, in which so many were to be stuck forever (al-Maqhur 1995: 39). No electricity, no paved streets, and large areas of pure slum. But he managed to travel on to other stations.

The text begins with a chapter on the emotional formation of the author. As a token of cultural allegiance, Maghur pays tribute to the Koranic school and the memorizing of the Qur'an. This is the first station that comes to his mind. He recalls his diligence in study, partly motivated by fear of being beaten by his teacher, the *faqīh*. But he also venerated the wooden tablet that he learned to write on and willingly drank the muddy water with which it was washed in order to absorb the blessings attached to the word of God. He fondly remembers the sheikhs whose preaching and recitations he used to listen to in the mosques. The religious heritage made a deep emotional impression on him as a boy, filling him with awe and evoking dreams and magic ever since (al-Maqhur 1995: 34). It also made him feel immediately at home in al-Azhar in Egypt, where he later continued his education in accordance with a long tradition among his people. Another source of intellectual stimulation for the boy was the oral heritage: tales and popular songs, epic poetry and elegies for Islamic heroes. The folkloristic element is strong in the book. The author quotes many verses from the oral literature he heard in his youth, but also frequently digresses into discussions of traditional customs, dress, artifacts, and tools that are part of Libyan culture. This theme naturally highlights the role of language in national identity.

Dialogue in Maghur's creative works is generally in the Libyan dialect for realistic effect and, possibly, national specificity. His use of local idiom at least gives a pronounced local connotation to his art (Diana 2008: 67). In the short story "Zayn al-Qamar" (The Beauty of the Moon), the scene is a prison cell.[17] Here we have a fast-paced first-person narrative with a lot of dialogue in Libyan dialect in order to make the characters appear both realistic and typical of local people. The narrator is a poor worker, Amir, thrown into a dark cell for being drunk. With him in the cell are three other persons. The suspense in the story hinges on Amir's gradual discovery of the others and his fear of the situation. One of the others is a completely drunken mate of Amir, who stupidly mumbles the refrain of the popular song that is also the source of the story's title. The others are a man who has been brutally beaten and now seems to be dying, and a sturdy figure with blackened teeth and scary

looks who turns out to be a murderer. The story ends with Amir join-
ing the killer in loudly protesting their rough treatment by the police,
banging the cell door and asking for water. This tale illustrates the harsh
living conditions of the poor and the brutality of the police, but also
invites solidarity between the oppressed and courage to resist the forces
of oppression.

The use of dialect is very important for the national flavor of the text.
So too in *Mahattat* is the plotting and dramatization in accordance with
conventional creative-writing techniques. All the narrative devices from
fiction – ellipsis, pause, scene and summary – are employed in a natural
fashion. The scenes may be short, mostly fragments really, but contain
direct speech that allows readers not just too see the characters but also
to hear them in their native tongue. The narrative is consistently focal-
ized through the mind of the author-as-boy. He is not quite sure what
is happening in the world of grown-ups, but he senses the tensions and
witnesses the strife around him. Kamel acts in the narrative as a char-
acter separate from the narrator and author, who alternates between
first person, second person, and third person narration as he relates
the events of his youth. In speaking about himself in the third person
as "the little one," "the Maghrebi boy," "the Maghrebi student," and
the like (al-Maqhur 1995: 127, 132, 221, 222) he emulates the narrative
example of Taha Husayn, who had made such a profound impression
on him in school. Kamel in the text almost appears as a Libyan counter-
part to the boy-hero of *al-Ayyam,* in that both are child prodigies from a
backward environment who struggle against strict traditions to become
enlightened modern men of influence in the world.

In the social turmoil following the World War II and in the wake of the
human suffering it brought, a new political awareness started to develop
among the inhabitants of Tripoli, according to the author's description
of the period. The boy grows and enters the city for the first time. The
emergence of various Arab clubs and an Arab civil society attracts his
attention. The first political parties are now created and demands for
independence voiced. Parts of the narrative revolve around the situa-
tion of the Libyan Jews. They were despised by their Muslim neighbors,
but fully integrated into the local society, where common economic
interests often eclipsed prejudices (al-Maqhur 1995: 103–22).

Reading about the Italian community in colonial Tripoli as expe-
rienced by the colonized Arabs is also historically fascinating. Fascist
Italy launched a mass settlement policy in the country during the late
1930s. Tens of thousands of new Italian immigrants were brought to the
land and provided with newly built houses and farms. The colony of

Libya was almost entirely a Fascist creation. Huge economic resources were poured into the country, resulting in a level prosperity for the Italian community. According to one historian, by 1940 Tripoli had developed into one of the more attractive Mediterranean cities (Wright 2010: 159). When the war ended, there were still about 40,000 Italians in Tripolitania and an Italian protectorate over the region was a real political possibility at the time (Wright 2010: 171–2).

Colonial Libya was a racially segregated society where a white skin designated rights and good and a brown skin meant no-rights and no-good. Libyan Arabs were second-class citizens and the victims of racial discrimination. By law, no Libyan could hold a post or practice a profession that would result in an Italian serving under him. Libyans were prevented from entering cafes or restaurants frequented by Italians, could not ride in a taxi driven by an Italian or travel first class, and so on (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 216; al-Fagih 1983: 24–5; Wright 2010: 165). However, Kamel Maghur's literary description in *Mahattat* of this reality is populated with people from all strands of society and contains much humor and keen human understanding. His childhood is not staged as tragedy. The author creates many successful portraits of characters who inhabited his neighborhood. It is a segregated society, but not in retrospect without its amusing features. One relates to the Bira Oya brewery. Owned by a German, directed by an Italian, and run by Arab workers, its products were gladly drunk by all (al-Maqhur 1995: 40).

The second homeland

Why did the Arab Spring of 2011 have such a decisive impact on Libya? How come Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt saw the closely connected fall of old regimes? Why were these three Arab countries changed politically at the same time? One reason is their strong historical bonds in terms of trade and culture. Traditionally, all religious learning and high culture in Tripoli or Benghazi came either from the mosques and madrassas of al-Zaytuna in Tunis or of al-Azhar in Cairo. Historically, then, these three countries behaved like communicating vessels. When an idea, religious custom, social practice, political notion arises in one country, it spreads and rises to the same level in all three of them, regardless of their differences in shape and size. If additional liquid is added to one vessel, the liquid will find an equal level in all the connected vessels.

The Arab Spring follows this old pattern. Strong physical and cultural links with Egypt made Benghazi the natural starting point for the revolt. That the Libyan revolution of 1969 appeared under the Nasserist banner

of Arab socialism and pan-Arabism further demonstrates the interconnectedness between these countries. In August 1972, President Sadat of Egypt and Colonel Gadaffi of Libya jointly announced that there would be a complete merger of their two states by September 1973. Even if this never came to pass, the idea of the two countries belonging to the same nation did not disappear. Thus, it is not surprising that Egyptian politics have had a major impact on the politics of Libya, nor that Egyptian literature heavily influenced the development of Libyan letters. Kamel Maghur began as a short story writer during his student years in Cairo in the 1950s. He was profoundly influenced by the school of social realism, just like his Egyptian contemporaries. From Egypt, the young writer sent back his stories to Libya to be published in journals and magazines, before returning home in 1957 with a law degree.

The second half of *Mahattat* describes the impact of the Egyptian metropolis on the teenager from rural Tripoli. His impressions and experiences of the Muslim popular quarters take the form of a journey of exploration. In time, this Cairo becomes a second home. The autobiography is also a declaration of love for this other homeland, openly eulogized and celebrated in long, almost lyrical passages for its learning and culture, its vitality and freedom-loving spirit (e.g. al-Maqhur 1995: 225–9, 264–5, 315–6).

But how does the one home connect with the other? Or rather, how does the one exile compare with the other? Living alone with his brothers in Cairo with few opportunities to visit the family in faraway Tripoli, these are questions that plague the protagonist. Staying in one place, he soon longs for the other and vice versa (al-Maqhur 1995: 284–87). And because he belongs to two cities/countries and has different identities in each, he has to travel: "You leave one of them to return to the other, but you don't really know which one you leave and which one you return to. Thus you have to leave – and you have to return" (Ibid: 287). The boy Kamel is always on the road to somewhere, and the road, like the journey with its stations, is as good a metaphor as any for the Libyan nation.

In 1937, the dictator Benito Mussolini visited Libya. The occasion was the opening of a new coastal road from the Tunisian border in the west all the way to the Egyptian frontier in the east. The building of this *Litoranea* had been a large and costly Italian enterprise, a prestige project. For the first time in history, the natural barrier of the Sirtica desert was pierced by a regular road. Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were now united as one country. This famous road is the setting of the short story "al-Tariq" (The Road).[18] The main character is a bus driver driving from

Tripoli to Benghazi. The bus is full. One passenger is going to buy flour in Benghazi, where it is cheaper. Another travels because tobacco is finished in Agedabia. There is an old sheikh swearing over the open beauty of a young woman. A mother and son are going to visit the father, who is working in Benghazi. The bus is a mini Libya, and the road ties the land together. The driver honks his horn at goats and camels. The desert is hot and the horizon unending. The passengers fall asleep and the driver thinks of his family. He is sad because his son is seriously ill. His wife fears for the boy's life. He tried to get him into hospital but, since he is poor, failed. He did not have a doctor's prescription. The novel raises the issue of a healthcare, which is not for all, a typical cause for a committed writer like Kamel Maghur.

The economic development of Libya during his lifetime was certainly stunning, thanks to oil. It may seem surprising that as a young man the future president of OPEC wrote mainly about the poor and powerless. However, the *maḥalla* or quarter where he grew up was home to the marginalized and destitute, so he knew them well and could understand their plight. The Libya of his youth was the poorest country in the Arab world (Wright 2010: 174). People were unskilled and uneducated. In 1949 there were only 16 university graduates in the whole country (Ibid: 165). Many lived on little more than bread and tea, hardly had clothes enough to protect them against the winter cold, and suffered from hunger and sickness. Most people in al-Dahra walked barefoot all year round and never tasted meat, according to the childhood memories he presents. Nevertheless, to him it was an environment rich in cultural traditions and human warmth, a place to remember with fondness.

Kamel Maghur died in Rome in 2002, ten years before the February revolution of 2011 that ended the long rule of Moammar Gadaffi. Would Maghur have defected and joined the opposition, as many Libyan diplomats and officials did? We will never know. His literature is driven by a genuine solidarity with the poor and unfortunate in society. He is an engaged Arab writer of the old school, but he was silent on the political oppression in Gadaffi's Libya. The extent of his involvement in the crimes of the regime is unknown. As minister of foreign affairs, he could not have been unaware of how the system worked. His autobiography does not provide any answers. The story ends in 1952, when Kamel is just 17 and has become a politically engaged student in a secondary school in Cairo. The last event described is an historical, thus symbolic, day of demonstrations and riots against the British. That day, a number of fires were lit in the Egyptian capital. The angry

demonstrators also attacked bars, cinemas, nightclubs, and boutiques as symbols of Western interests and of upper class corruption. The implicit date is January 26 and large parts of Cairo's central business district go up in flames. A new age is dawning in both the life of the protagonist and of the nation, as the author makes clear (al-Maqhur 1995: 315–31).

In the early 1950s, Kamel Maghur was a young man becoming interested in literature and politics and awakening to the realities of life. He participated in the national liberation movement of the time and argued for social change in his literature. He joined the Libyan revolution, but eventually became a tool of a repressive system. Some of the young men of today from the suburb of al-Dahra in Tripoli, where revolutionary graffiti now deck the walls, will probably also write their memoirs in the future. What kind of nation Libya will then be is hard to predict. Hopefully it will be a country where creative literature has regained its freedom and vitality.

Notes

1. At the end of the war in 1945, there were about 35,000 Jews in Tripoli. Libyan Jews, traditionally traders and financiers, were the principal intermediaries between Libyan Arabs and European buyers in precolonial times. The Italian occupation of Libya in 1911 changed relations between Jews and Muslims through a policy of favoritism toward the Jews. Even if the Fascist regime later modified this policy, the relatively prosperous Jewish community remained privileged in relation to the poor Arab masses throughout the Italian occupation. For a brief sketch of Libya's minorities, see Chorin (2008: 204–13).
2. The Italians built separate state elementary schools for their own children, Jewish children, and Arab children. They also encouraged the opening of more private Koranic schools. The main purpose of Italian education policy for Arabs in Libya seems to have been to produce Italian-speaking subjects instilled with respect for and devotion to Italy but knowing little else. Secondary and higher education for Libyans was completely neglected and indigenous cultural aspirations suppressed (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 205; al-Fagih 1983: 30–2; Chorin 2008: 190; Wright 2010: 166–7).
3. Conventional English spelling of the author's name is used throughout this article, except in the references.
4. In Italian Fascist discourse, Libya was called "the Fourth Shore of Our Sea": in January 1939 the four coastal provinces of Tripoli, Misurata, Benghazi, and Derna were made an integral part of metropolitan Italy (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 215; Wright 2010: 153, 165).
5. Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih, for example, considers him one of the pioneers of the realistic short story in Libya (1983: 130–6, 281), as does Ethan Chorin, who calls him "the patron saint" of Tripoli-based literature (2008: 15, 230).

Omar Abulqasim Alkikli likewise mentions Kamel Maghur as one of the most significant names in the genre during the 1950s and 1960s (2011: 44).

6. On Ibrahim al-Koni, see, for example, Allen (1995: 129, 244–58) and Cooke (2010).

7. In Italian, there is the 2008 study by Diana, *La letteratura della Libia,* dealing with the development of prose literature in Libya from colonial times. The same author has written a book on the image of Italians in Libyan literature up until the fall of Gaddafi (Diana 2011). In English, in 1983 Libyan writer Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih [Ahmad Ibrahim al-Faqih] submitted a PhD dissertation tracing the history of the Libyan short story: *The Libyan Short Story* (Edinburgh). In more popular format, US diplomat Ethan Chorin's *Translating Libya. The Modern Libyan Short Story* (2008) is valuable both on cultural history and for the translations of short stories. An overview of Libyan fiction, including translations, is contained in a special issue of the literary magazine *Banipal* (No 40, 2011). For further references, see Diana (2008: 92 n.3, 170–4, and Bibliography).

8. The novel in question is *Iʿtirafat Insan* (The Confessions of a Human Being) by Mohammed Farid Siyala, published in Alexandria (cf. Ahmidan 2011: 46).

9. The novel in question is *Min Makka ila Huna* (From Mecca to Here) by al-Sadiq al-Nayhum. In her historical study, Diana discusses the different views of the birth of the Libyan novel in detail (2008: 102–5).

10. Another factor in the early literary life of Libya was the lack of publishing houses prior to the mid-1960s. It was therefore difficult for Libyan writers to publish books. Journals and periodicals served as the main vehicle for literature, which naturally influenced the format (al-Fagih 1983: 4).

11. Moreover, at least one of these titles is erroneously classified as a novel while in reality it is a collection of short stories: Kamil al-Maqhur. *al-Ams al-Mashnuq,* first published in 1968 and not in 1979 as given in Sakkut's bibliography (2000, II: 399 and VI: 3644).

12. This is Yasir Suleiman's approach to the issue of nationalism in the Arab socio-political context (Suleiman 2003: 34).

13. This pioneer was Zaʿima Sulayman al-Baruni (1910–76). In her preface to the book al-Baruni explains why she wrote the stories and what she was attempting to do: "It was to glorify nationalism and to introduce the new generations to the history of their ancestors and to give a genuine picture of the country" (as quoted by al-Fagih 1983: 101). For her biography, see Ashour et al. (2008: 372–3) and al-Fagih (1983: 101–3).

14. The so-called Bevin-Sforza plan was a joint Anglo-Italian proposal put forward in 1949 to settle the future of Libya to the mutual benefit of the two powers and Western interests in general. According to the plan, there were to be trusteeships for Britain in Cyrenaica, for Italy in Tripolitania and for France in Fezzan. It was rejected in the UN General Assembly (Wright 2010: 172–3).

15. For an assessment of Maghur's contribution to the Libyan short story, with summaries and analyses of many of his stories, see al-Fagih (1983: 130–6) and Diana (2008: 66–7, 78–82). Al-Fagih places him in a group of writers characterized by their "realistic approach," including in their portrayals of the Libyan national identity and Libyan personality: "It is in the stories of these writers that the emphasis on the true identity of the country is

most evident: trying their best to give as accurate a picture as possible of life around them, and enriching their stories with detailed description of the social environment" (al-Fagih 1983: 130–1).

16. For further information on these titles, see Chorin (2008: 230) and Diana (2008: 82).

17. From the collection *al-Ams al-Mashnuq* (al-Maqhur n.d.: 71–9). According to Ahmed al-Fagih, "Zayn al-Qamar" ranks among Maghur's more successful stories (al-Fagih 1983: 134–5).

18. From the collection *al-Ams al-Mashnuq* (al-Maqhur n.d.: 133–40); cf. al-Fagih (1983: 135).

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Part III

8

Deconstructing Nation and Religion: Young Saudi Women Novelists

Madawi Al-Rasheed

The cosmopolitan woman that both state and sections of Saudi society strove to locate and highlight after 9/11 has found expression in the fiction of the young generation of Saudi women novelists.[1] These young women are urban, educated, sophisticated, and conversant in many languages. They belong to the emerging middle class that has benefited from oil wealth, education, and, since the late 1990s, the free market economy that opened up business and investment opportunities and also the media in its old and new forms. The new novelists are extremely young – for example, Raja al-Sani was 24 when she published her first novel *Banat al-Riyadh* (Girls of Riyadh), in 2005.[2] Others are in their early 30s. Their heroines are immersed in a cosmopolitan fantasy, portrayed as cappuccino drinkers, shisha smokers, and globe-trotters. They move between home, college, private business, and shopping center like aspirant, privileged youth anywhere today. These new novelists know only the local modern high-rise shopping center, the cafe culture, and their equivalents in famous world capitals. Above all, they are "connected" through family networks, the virtual world of the internet, and regular travel. Their language is a mixture of Arabic and English, peppered with the idioms and abbreviations of e-mail, Yahoo groups, Facebook, and Twitter. Heroines are lovers who travel to London and Sharm al-Shaykh to experience freedoms denied at home, such as a night with a dream lover, sipping a glass of wine, or spending time with the opposite sex in restaurants, cafes, and parks. From the new avenues of Riyadh to the streets of London, New York, and San Francisco, they skillfully navigate places and cultures. They travel for education, work experience, freedom, and holidays. The novelists and their heroines

are products of the neoliberal capitalist economy that creates "avenues, means, and commodities of gratification, material and symbolic, often related in one way or another to sexuality" (Zubaida 2011: 8).

At home, heroines shop in glass-and-steel malls, carry Louis Vuitton bags, and blog in Arabic and English. Some find themselves in the hands of the Committee for the Promotion of Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong. Others are engaged in playful, carefully concealed acts of courtship and flirtation that do not have such dramatic results. These heroines' struggle is between them and society, with its many agents of control. In these novels, mothers, fathers, brothers, and husbands work hand in hand with state agencies to enforce surveillance over young women.

Some women novelists document the lives of "halfies," hybrid Saudis, some born abroad and brought back to Saudi Arabia. While their fathers are Saudis, their mothers may be any other nationality. They are in between cultures, geographies, and languages. Their numbers increased dramatically when higher education scholarships sent thousands of young Saudi men abroad. Many returned with foreign wives or had children born in the United States, Britain, Egypt, and elsewhere. While many novelists are themselves genealogical, educational, and cultural "hybrids," their heroines stretch hybridity even further. What unites novelists and heroines is that both are young urban women who have emerged as a result of Saudi Arabia's increasing immersion since the 1990s in late capitalism, frequent travel, globalization, consumer culture, privatization, and the neoliberal market economy. In this context, the old Wahhabi religious nationalism struggles to keep such "immoral" influences away from the nation, while itself being immersed in the same new economic forces. But it too globalized its message, capitalizing on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The battle between old-fashioned religious nationalism and the icons of the new modernity is, however, difficult to win. The old *fatwa*s survive to condemn excessive consumption, Western influences, and other undesirable ways of behaving and thinking. The youth of the country ignore them, and women challenge them – if not in real life, then in novels.

International attention devoted to such new novelists captures an age-old fascination with Muslim women in general, and Saudi women in particular. While in the West there is some familiarity with the fiction of Arab women novelists, there is no precedent for the new interest in the Saudi women novelists of the post-9/11 period, although Saudi women have been writing novels and non-fiction since the 1950s. Despite previous timid attempts to translate Saudi women's short stories

into English,[3] nothing matched the excitement and publicity that surrounded the translation of Raja al-Sani's *Girls of Riyadh* in 2007. The historical context of this new interest is extremely important for understanding not only Saudi women's fiction but also the local and international context in which Saudi women are perceived, promoted, pitied, and supported.

Since 9/11, Saudi women novelists, especially Raja al-Sani, have become "Muslim celebrities," with special emphasis on their Muslim identity. Interest in their work goes beyond its literary quality to touch on deeper political and social contexts. In the words of al-Sani's translator, Marilyn Booth:

> The contemporary Saudi novel, especially with a female authorial signature fixed to it, is a case in point. Publishers are keen to get their hands on Saudi writing: if there is a single society that contemporary US readers see as encapsulating the mystery of the "Islamic Orient," it is Saudi Arabia. Within that mystery, the mystery of mysteries remains the Arab Muslim woman, often homogenized and made to stand in for an entire society and history.
>
> (Booth 2010: 160)

When writing fiction, young Saudi women novelists with an eye to international celebrity embark on a journey of self-Orientalizing. In Booth's opinion "it's the harem (in Hollywood) all over again" (Booth 2007: 199). Yet the difference between the old well-documented Oriental gaze and the current one stems from the fact that Saudi women have themselves become authors of their own Orientalist texts. Moreover, if the old-style Orientalism described by Edward Said and others (Kabbani 1986) was driven by relations of power, current self-Orientalizing Saudi literature is driven solely by commercial, sensational considerations. Young Saudi women write Orientalist texts in response to neoliberal market forces, namely the current Saudi context with its new scrutiny by global media, economic privatization, and the commercialization of literature and intellectual production.

Saudi women – rather than foreign male Orientalists – produce images of idle Saudi women desperate for excitement, seduction, love, and adventure in a society that allegedly denies them these pleasures. Other Arab women novelists have already engaged in this genre of writing in response to market forces, consumption patterns, and the expectations of international readers. Those whose books have become internationally available have Orientalized Saudi women, who appear as the

other, against which an Arab novelist can distinguish herself for a Western audience. In the Lebanese author Hanan al-Shaykh's novels, the Lebanese heroine who finds herself in the desert kingdom escapes the hell of primitiveness and liberates her soul by moving to Western capitals.[4]

The evaluation of the new Saudi women's literature is dominated by the Oriental gaze, still fascinated by the hidden lives of veiled Muslim women – their love, passion, and straight and queer sexuality – a gaze that yields fame, celebrity, and money through publication. The young, female celebrity novelist, veiled or not, is educated, articulate, and attractive. She combines her light, colorful designer veil with the latest Western fashion. Her "Islamic" femininity is defined in terms of her complete immersion in Western consumerism, with only a colorful silky veil marking any visual difference. Consumption is not simply about material goods, but involves meaning, values, and aspirations associated with late modernity.

The novelist appears at international book fairs, gives interviews, and defends her fiction in several languages. In fact, she is the translator of her own fiction (Booth 2007). While few Saudi novelists have regularly appeared in Western literary forums, many find refuge in neighboring Gulf countries, where vibrant, more open forums and media are available. Many women novelists publish their novels outside Saudi Arabia, where well-known Arab publishers have identified a market for their so-called daring fiction.

Young women novelists are new voices, delving into desire, sexuality, and passion, thus destroying the taboo always associated with these topics. While a previous generation of novelists wrote about lives constrained by history, geography, and tradition, and may make strong allusions to sexual themes, the new novelists choose explicit language. The body, its desire and passions, has become central in many novels published since 2000. These new young novelists have indeed chosen to make war on taboos. Their heroines are not mothers and grandmothers but school and college students, struggling with restrictions on sexuality, personal freedom, marriage choices, and relationships.

According to *Baha Literary Salon* prepared by the Saudi Nadi al-Baha al-Adabi, there has been a dramatic increase in the Saudi novels dealing with sex. In 2007, 55 novels, by both men and women, had sexual themes. The number increased to 64 and 70 in 2008 and 2009, respectively (ba Amer 2010). These figures attest to the predominance of the economies of desire, in which sexuality is central. As expected, novels with explicit sexual material have attracted criticism. In oral

cultural settings, Saudi women, and Arab women in general, engage in informal and elaborate "sexual" talk that may appear shocking to Western middle-class women. The latter are far more reserved in discussing their own sex lives, but have no qualms about exploring and exchanging information gathered from *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* magazines and popular television series. Saudi women's sexual conversations are neither condemned nor embarrassing to those engaging in them, provided they occur among married women. Young unmarried girls are often excluded, but are engaged in constant sex talk among themselves. What is shocking for Saudis is the entry of sex talk into the public sphere through novels written by unmarried girls. Religious sex manuals are accepted and widely circulated in Saudi Arabia, provided they are supported by religious evidence and opinions. However, the new novels are different. They are narratives of personal female desires, passions, and sexual encounters that are still not welcomed in the public sphere: hence the strong reaction of many Saudis to novels such as *Girls of Riyadh*. When informal, private girls' sex talk moves from the usual oral context to become international literature, most in Saudi society are shocked – with the exception of a small cosmopolitan, government-employed intellectual and business elite. For example, the poet, diplomat, and civil servant Ghazi al-Gosaybi (d. 2010) endorsed *Girls of Riyadh* and wrote a prologue.

Women's sex novels have been condemned by many literary critics and a large section of the public. Even Arab literary figures and observers have been astonished by the daring literary productions of this generation of Saudi novelists. Layla al-Othman, a Kuwaiti novelist and essayist, who herself had written daring texts with explicit sexual references, accused Saudi novelists of overdoing the sexual theme.[5] Many Saudi women writers agreed. Sharifa al-Shamlan and Siham al-Qahtani accepted al-Othman's criticism. Al-Qahtani wrote that she is sometimes ashamed to read sections of these novels. While al-Othman's long writing experience allows her to deal with sexual themes in sophisticated ways, many new Saudi women novelists lack such skills, and their sex scenes are vulgar, without benefit of dramatization, according to some critics. But other Saudi women writers were surprised that al-Othman, who suffered ostracism and imprisonment in Kuwait for her daring literary productions, should voice criticism of the recent Saudi novels (al-Daghfaq 2010).

Many Saudi novelists explain the saturation of the new literature with sexual themes as a reflection of the obsession of Saudi society with this human instinct. Novelist and essayist Badriyya al-Bishr argues that

sexual themes in the new literature do not amount to society's excessive obsession with sex. Contemporary Arab literature

> is saturated with sexual scenes but critics do not concern themselves with this. Only when Saudi women write about sex, they are singled out. This is because the country has been grounded in darkness and now things have changed. Women's voices, which were absent, are now heard around the world.
>
> (Interview with author, Dubai, January 5, 2011)

Saudi society, in her opinion, is

> organised around sex, either to make it permissible or to prohibit it. Sex is everywhere. Obsession with sex permeates all institutions like marriage and education. Young girls encounter sex as children if they are sexually harassed, they then come face to face with it as adolescents, whose mothers groom them for marriage. Later in marriage, sex is the primary purpose.
>
> (Ibid)

In general, many Saudi women criticize their reduction to sex objects, not only in novels, but in society. Educationalist Mounira Jamjoum forcibly argued that "we had enough of limiting our humanity as women to sex" (Jamjoum 2011). This overwhelming presence of sex and representations of sex in popular fiction is not unique to Saudi Arabia. Iran, a country sharing many features with Saudi Arabia, has also promoted, regulated, or condemned sex in recent years in an unprecedented manner at the level of both state and society. In Iran, sex has become both source of freedom and act of political rebellion (Mahdavi 2009). But since the 1980s, the regulation of the sex lives of citizens has become state policy, explained and propagated by religious scholars.[6]

The overwhelming place of sex in contemporary Saudi society may not be simply an innate and eternal "Saudi" obsession, a compulsive condition, but rather a reflection of interrelated contemporary factors. First, the alleged obsession with sex is a reflection of the marriage between religious nationalism, with its focus on the private sphere as a protected and heavily regulated arena, and the desire of the state to gain religious legitimacy by controlling and regulating the private sex lives of its citizens. This desire is manifested in the endless signs separating men and women in public; the regulation of marriage to foreigners, which require ministry of interior permission; the guardianship system

imposed on women; and many other legal restrictions aimed at regulating the body and its desires, in addition to family and marriage. Political and religious forces have combined to generate an obsession that baffles novelists such as Badriyya al-Bishr and many outside observers. To comply with the tenets of the old religious nationalism, the state must be seen to regulate, control, and manage all personal and private desires. The occasional raid on an encounter between a man and a woman in a restaurant, the central theme in a novel discussed later, is very important. It symbolizes the state's commitment to protecting the public sphere from the excess of desire, initially stimulated by the state and its entrepreneurs in the form of elaborate urban shopping developments and private initiatives to transform the landscape so that the cosmopolitan fantasy flourishes for all to see, but not consume or enjoy. To distinguish this new urban space from any other in the world, the state must control sex and desire to occasionally remind people of its commitment to religious nationalism.

Second, Saudi immersion in a capitalist economy that fetishizes sex, promotes unlimited desire, and stretches the imagination in the service of gratification has turned a natural instinct into an obsession. The oil economy had tremendous impacts on gender relations, marriage, and sexual life. Sudden wealth opened up new opportunities for sex, while social mores and religion were not able to keep pace. Saudi ʿulamaʾ have struggled to accommodate old desires that had become more urgent. The popular *misyar* and *urfi* marriages of the 1980s exemplify the constant quest for solutions to problems imposed by changing economic, social, and demographic circumstances. The solutions remain grounded in the requirements of religious nationalism, that is, privileging procreation within the legitimate Islamic family framework. Saudi ʿulamaʾ justified these marriages, and from the 1990s invented more daring unions such as *misfar* (travel), *nahar* (daytime), and boyfriend marriages to respond to contemporary issues. A Saudi student at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah shocked a public student forum on *misyar* by announcing that "like men, women too look for sexual pleasures" (*Wakad*, March 4, 2010). Other girls supported her in private. These new unions remain controversial, but are increasing – especially among older unmarried women who live with their parents. *Misyar* marriages are now organized informally by female matchmakers, who have good knowledge of the local marriage "market" and arrange compatible unions (al-Hakeem 2005). Matchmakers report that they receive between seven and ten daily applications from men seeking *misyar* in Jeddah. Religious shaykhs who run offices attached to mosques to facilitate marriage

in Jeddah conduct *misyar* marriages, regardless of whether they accept them or not. Many women still object to solutions seen as privileging male interest, without consideration of their impact on women.

While the oil economy helped to consolidate the obsession with sex and enforcement of sex segregation, neoliberal monetization, privatization, consumption, and excessive advertising since the late 1990s have all pushed young Saudi women novelists to privilege sex stories in their recent literature. Saudi society is not naturally obsessed with sex: it is simply being drawn into global images and practices of old and new desires, including sex. It is therefore no surprise that novelists have internalized the alleged obsession with sex and saturated their stories with a quest to enjoy it against the background of disappointing marriages; social, legal, and religious restrictions; punishment; and denial. The "sex novel" appeared exactly when the state decided under pressure to reverse previous restrictions and promote the cosmopolitan woman. Erotic theology is no longer the only manual determining sexual desires and regulating sexual acts. Today, Saudi society is exposed to other sexual paradigms. The new novels reflect new developments and articulate the tension between old and new.

To illustrate these developments, I explore the literature of two young women writers who represent and articulate the cosmopolitan fantasy of the state and sections of Saudi society, mainly the upper middle class that is part of the state apparatus through education, privilege, employment, entrepreneurial activities, and global business. The two novelists published their books in Beirut, where Al-Saqi, their publisher, promotes this literature in the Arab world and abroad. At the time of writing, only al-Sani's novel had been translated into other languages.

Raja al-Sani: Hip-hop Saudi Muslim girls

In 2005 Raja al-Sani's first novel *Banat al-Riyadh* (*Girls of Riyadh*) enjoyed great success in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world (al-Sani 2005). It was translated into more than 20 languages. The novel does not exploit explicitly sexual scenes, but is focused on young women's seduction and desire. On her own webpage, Raja wants to be known as "a Muslim writer from Saudi who became famous through her bestselling novel . . . the author received death threats for bringing her nation's women into disrepute."[7] To an English-speaking audience, this biographical statement, together with a photograph of the veiled novelist, encompass all the dimensions that fascinate and enchant those seeking the secrets of Arabia "behind the veil," "Muslim," "Saudi," "women,"

and "death threats" are combined to open realms of excitement and scandal. These words respond to now dominant images of Muslim women and their oppression, and confirm a well-entrenched stereotype of Saudi Arabia. But audiences must explore further before the stereotype begins to be challenged.

The daughter of two doctors, al-Sani lived in Kuwait before her parents returned to Saudi Arabia. She is a dentist who started her training at King Saud University, and moved to Chicago after the publication of her first novel – partly for graduate education and partly to remove herself from the storm that erupted in response to her novel. Although al-Sani challenges many perceptions about her society, on her webpage she confirms her Muslim identity and commitment to her country. She informs audiences that she plans to return to Saudi Arabia and develop her own dental practice. She is thus a committed Muslim woman, who wants to work in her country and cause change from within. This narrative is too familiar in the context of Saudi Arabia. Working and changing the system from within is the ideal choice. It avoids escape labels such as "Westernized," "traitors," and "agents of foreign domination," and replaces them with commitment to Islam – but with a new cosmopolitan outlook. It is a strategy that avoids condemnation and reinforces the high moral ground of its advocates. In many ways this narrative remains grounded in religious nationalism, with a modern twist. This, however, did not spare Raja al-Sani the wrath of some of her compatriots. Two Saudi citizens even filed a lawsuit against her because her novel "is an outrage to the norms of Saudi society. It encourages vice and . . . portrays the Kingdom's female community as women who do not cover their faces and who appear publicly in an immodest way" (Qusti 2006). The lawsuit was rejected by the Court of Grievances in Riyadh.

The success of al-Sani's novel in Saudi Arabia and beyond[8] is attributed to the ability of many young women to see themselves in one of her four characters. More importantly, its success is a function of the cosmopolitan fantasy the author promotes about sophisticated, mobile elite women and their families, competent in many cultures, languages, dialects, and constantly searching for excitement and contrast rather than conformity. *Girls of Riyadh* is considered a Saudi version of British and North American "Chick Lit," combining concern with identity, race, and class with a depiction of the messy social realities facing young women (Booth 2007: 197). In the novel, the narrator, the French *moi* who remains unknown, is a cybernaut who promises hot stories about scandals and rave parties involving her four girlfriends

assembled through e-mail messages on Yahoo. Every week she replies to e-mails and proceeds to tell more stories about her characters. She warns readers and subscribers to her "seerawenfadha7et" Yahoo group that any resemblance between the characters and reality is deliberate (*maqsud*), and thus from page one she merges fiction with reality. The lives of four young women are centered on education, entertainment, their aspirations for love and career, marriage, divorce, achievement, and disappointment. The university is where the girls mix with others they would not have encountered in old Riyadh. Shia girls from Eastern Province intermingle with local Najdi, Hijazi, and Qasimi girls. The intermingling serves to highlight difference and diversity. The religious and cultural differences that make the local a heterogeneous mix, contrast with the homogenized image peculiar to the religious nationalist ideology, with obvious stereotypical, predetermined, and prejudiced opinions about the other.

In addition to tragedy, the four girls are fascinated by the rituals of seduction experienced by marriageable girls of every culture. Their longing for a love match is crushed by old men and women who resist losing control and cooperate to continue surveillance. An arranged marriage ends in divorce (*Qamra*), while another awaited marriage stumbles when Sadim allows its consummation prior to the wedding night. Michele, the "halfie" whose Arabic is not so good, cannot achieve full acceptance in society as her mother is American. Mixed parentage becomes an obstacle to her marrying her first love. Finally, the only success is Lamis's marriage to a medical school colleague. The girls move between Riyadh, London, Chicago, and San Francisco, very much like upper-class cosmopolitan Saudi girls. The boredom of life in Riyadh is interrupted by liberating holidays, education, and work experience abroad. While all the girls hope to fulfill their love and career aspirations, they struggle with restrictive norms, traditions, and social pressures. They are even ready to venture into forbidden territory to meet potential marriage candidates, thus risking severe punishment and harassment. The theme of girls pursuing men is a reversal of traditional marriage arrangements involving the search for a suitable wife by men and their mothers. Al-Sani's girls are similar to others in the Arab world, who have recently shocked their society with their daring narratives about finding a suitable husband.[9] Her girls seem to know what they want and are skillful in circumventing the endless limitations of their society. Al-Sani achieved the stardom depicted for her narrator. Endorsement by novelist, poet, and minister of labor, Ghazi al-Gosaybi, reflects local connectivity, encouragement, and support. She may have enraged religious scholars

and Islamists and offended guardians of religious nationalism, but she was protected from above.

Each chapter opens with a couple of lines of poetry, a phrase by a famous writer, a verse from the Quran, or a saying from the *hadith*s. The text becomes anchored in a hybrid space that invokes multiple layers of meaning and experience. But in this pastiche al-Sani exposes hypocrisy in Saudi society, which explains the strong negative reaction to her in the country. She tells familiar stories, such as women swapping their Saudi attire for Western fashions and vice versa in aircraft toilets, depending on the direction of flight.

Islam and culture are not taken for granted, but their troubled relationship is explored with insight – how they collide at one level while reinforcing each other at another. For example, after the religious marriage formalities are completed, sexual relations between husband and wife are licit in Islam. However, social tradition prohibits the sexual act until after the wedding night, and even then a bride is supposed to resist for several nights, to show her shyness and purity. In the novel, a girl is divorced simply for practicing what is permissible in Islam but prohibited by society. In a society with severe sex segregation, a girl's dream to mix with the opposite sex may push her to study medicine as one of the very few educational contexts in which she will be exposed to boys. Segregation forces boys to accompany girls to shopping centers under the pretense that they are siblings. The youth emerge in this novel as assertive and skillful in bypassing social and religious obstacles. But many tragedies are unavoidable. These are rooted in a world where the veneer of piety and tradition poses real challenges for the privileged classes, whose wealth, education, and consumption patterns make them intolerant of their own society and alienated from its control agencies.

The girls of Riyadh are strong and weak, resilient and vulnerable. They evoke sympathy, admiration, and pity. The novel invites us to consider fictionalized Saudi girls as real, hence its extraordinary success at a time when only trashy fiction about life behind the veil dominated the market for fiction about Saudi Arabia.

While the literary credentials of this novel are beyond the scope of this assessment (Booth 2010), what is important from my perspective is how the success of a specific piece of fiction by a young Saudi woman is yet another step toward finding the cosmopolitan woman, who might be fantasy or reality. In both situations she is a desired outcome, a long-awaited gift to save the nation from previous stereotypes, prejudices, violence, and misconceptions. While the cosmopolitan woman is already a real fixture in Saudi society, fiction depicts her as a woman

embarking on a long journey in search of individuality, love, and desire. *Girls of Riyadh* celebrates the women denounced and despised by the guardians of religious nationalism, the feared, upper-class, Westernized hybrid women who confuse boundaries, and embrace multiple cultures, lifestyles, and languages. While the girls in the novel do not represent Saudi women, in reality their kind is becoming more common in urban Saudi Arabia.[10]

Samar al-Moqrin: Imprisoned cosmopolitan fantasies

If al-Sani's novel avoided explicit sex scenes in favor of the quest for seduction and flirtation, with *Women of Vice* Samar al-Moqrin throws her heroine wholeheartedly into the forbidden act of adultery. While al-Sani's novel engages in aspects of self-Orientalizing, al-Moqrin delves into the heart of the Orientalizing project, namely, sexualizing Saudi women in an overt market economy of desire. In *Women of Vice,* the heroine is described as selfish to begin with, thus challenging traditional expectations associated with motherhood, giving, and sacrifice. She occupies that twilight zone between marriage and divorce, a liminal, ambiguous, and dangerous space experienced by women who are married but have not been granted a divorce. After eight years of marriage, Sara is *mu'alaqa*, hanging between marriage and divorce. Her appeals in the central Riyadh court for a divorce result in frustration until a new man, Raif, appears in her life, returning her vitality and joy. She finally finds love on the streets of London when she meets her lover, whom she had previously encountered in the virtual world of e-mail, text messages, telephone conversations, and chat rooms. Their meetings, when they become real, prove to be daunting. Nevertheless, in London the lovers satisfy their quest to encounter each other away from the policing agents of Riyadh. Hyde Park becomes synonymous with freedom. It is enjoyed for its flowers and green grass, but most importantly for the sight of lovers exchanging kisses. While the rest of the world remains oblivious to such intimacy in public places, a Saudi mother shouts her insults: "Infidels!" (al-Moqrin 2008: 20). In addition to love and courting, there is debate in "speak corner" (Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park), allegedly where Saudi dissidents started their opposition to the government. She is reminded that "this is Britain, the bastion of democracy" (Ibid: 21).[11] After days enjoying the company of her lover and London, the moment of return arrives. Back in Riyadh, she sends messages to her lover, who resists her appeals and ignores her calls. Obviously, he practices the usual hypocrisy, enjoying a woman while condemning her for

her lost morality. Finally, a meeting in a Riyadh restaurant with Raif ends when members of the Committee for the Promotion of Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong raid the restaurant and arrest those who are together without being married or related. Raif serves a short prison sentence, while Sara is sentenced to four years in a women's prison and 700 lashes. She initially refuses to sign the documents that implicate her in more serious offences and continues to profess innocence. Love and meetings are crimes. The shaykh in charge of her case insults her, using strong language that refers to her intimate organs. Scandal follows, and the family abandons Sara, inevitable outcomes after being caught by the Committee, regardless of the offence. In prison, Sara encounters murderers, prostitutes, and adulteresses. They tell their stories while invoking both defiance and repentance. Four months after her release from prison, Sara gives up on finding Raif. With no future or career, she works as a coffee server (*sababa*) at wedding parties. Women are hired to perform this job, for which they get meager pay. Despite her concern that her friends may recognize her during a wedding, she continues to work. At one wedding, the singer calls upon women guests to cover themselves as the bridegroom will enter the women's hall to meet his bride. The bridegroom is Raif, who enters the room only to leave Sara's soul forever.

The cosmopolitan fantasy that *Girls of Riyadh* entertains is repeated in *Women of Vice*. Its characters move between Riyadh and London to experience pleasure and escape the limitations of society and religion. In this novel, the boundaries between inside and outside are more rigid. Transgression is only possible outside, while adventures involving the crossing of boundaries inside result in tragedy. This black-and-white depiction of place seeks the fantasy abroad, as it is denied freedom and engulfed with danger at home. While "inside" is the antithesis of cosmopolitan free life, it turns into a prison, the ultimate confined space, where vice is pushed away from the virtuous society. Longing for the outside and the pleasures that are permissible there is punished by banishment from the hearts of men. Men seek women as objects of desire abroad, after which they condemn them for their "immorality." Women seek love and affection from such men, only to be disappointed by their neglect after a sexual encounter. Men do not want to marry a woman who succumbs to their desires, a well-rehearsed theme in many other literary productions. In al-Sani's novel, Sadim's marriage is annulled because she surrenders to her husband before the wedding night. Similarly, in *Women of Vice* Sara prematurely gives away too much and pays the price.

Al-Moqrin launches verbal attacks on both Islamists and liberals: the first saturate the public sphere with their preaching; the second preach what they do not practice. The religious see vice everywhere and aspire to eradicate it, while *hadathi* (modern, secular) men are hypocrites in their relations with women. Such blunt political messages diminish the literary value of the novel and make it shallow, giving the impression of an immature style in which the novel is to be read as a statement about the plight of women rather than as literature. It seems that the hasty publication of this short novel in 2008 was a response to a market that welcomed and celebrated al-Sani's novel. *Women of Vice* seeks fame by repeating an already successful formula. Its opening adulterous act is punished by a vindictive society, while the desire to seek a cosmopolitan life remains unfulfilled. As the novel moves between the bars of London and the bars of the Riyadh prison, it desperately seeks to appeal to an audience beyond Saudi Arabia. It remains a short statement with serious limitations, but it is symptomatic of the context in which it was written, published, and marketed. "Breaking the taboo" has become a marketing tool promoted by publishers and authors at the expense of serious literary qualities.

The fact that the taboo is about Saudi women and their sexuality has become standard, and in some cases it results in success for author and novel. However, many Saudi women novelists and their publishers underestimate the sophistication of Arab readers and the even more demanding tastes of an international audience, especially if they hope their work will be translated – particularly into English. Novels like this represent a quest for the cosmopolitan fantasy on the part of both novelists and heroines. Saudi women novelists are prepared even to fetishize love and sexuality in breaking the taboo and appealing to Saudi, Arab, and international audiences.

A new women's literature: Subverting nation or heroic resistance?

Assessing the literature of this new generation of women novelists enables us to explore the shifting practices and relations of power in Saudi society.[12] These practices are generated by the state, and theorized by the guardians of religious nationalism. The appearance of this new literature marks the changing balance of power between state and religious guardians in favor of the former. The power that targets women directly is evident in social and cultural contexts that may not be so different from the traditional contexts of the Muslim and Arab world.

If there is anything unique about Saudi Arabia, it is the long histori-cal association between state and religion in which women have been central. Throughout the modern history of the nation-state, women have been highlighted as a matter of concern for both the state and its religious guardians. The two have worked together to enforce dis-crimination that projects the required images and practices of piety and propriety. While secular Arab nation-states have since the 1950s, and with mixed results, espoused women and their emancipation as legit-imate causes under the rhetoric of national development, the Saudi state declared women in need of protection, welfare, and paternalis-tic support under the umbrella of Islam. Protecting women, enforcing their modesty, and guarding their honor were state projects from 1932. In recent years, emancipating women, developing them, and promot-ing them have replaced the old fixation with their protection, piety, and honor. This concern was shared by other states in the region, but Saudi Arabia remained unable to free itself from the requirements of religious nationalism.

However, after 9/11 a weakening of the principles of religious nation-alism has been deemed necessary to save the regime and improve its image. At this specific historical moment, the state switched to a vision that specifically highlights the cosmopolitan woman and her contri-bution to culture, society, and the economy. Together with a new generation of women entrepreneurs, the promotion of Saudi women novelists during the last decade is a product of this shift in state strategies. Moreover, serious economic measures such as restructuring, privatization, and liberalization and pervasive consumption, advertis-ing, and media expansion all led to the increased incorporation of Saudi women into global markets of commerce and publication. While Saudi Arabia's men have been drawn into this global market since the discov-ery of oil in the 1930s, the new economic changes introduced in the late 1990s began to have a dramatic impact on society, urban space, gender relations, and many aspects of social and political life. Violent religious and political trends consolidated their efforts to thwart the Saudi *infi-tah* (openness), which brought about dramatic change to individuals, families, and society. Highly educated and well-connected young nov-elists challenged the image of Saudi Arabia as a hotbed of religious radicalism. Their novels dismiss myths about piety and national homo-geneity and highlight the quest for the cosmopolitan fantasy nourished by the state and the new economy, with its excessive consumption and media activities. Women's literature, with its recurrent focus on sexual themes, the struggle of the body, and confrontation with the religious

guardians of Islamic tradition and society reflects the new restructuring of power relations in Saudi society. The state, with its new development discourse, and society's immersion in the new consumption economy that fetishizes desire, pleasure, and sexuality, are the new context.

If resistance is narrowly defined as actions that challenge or subvert unequal power relations, the new literature is neither subversion nor heroic resistance. But if one adopts a wider definition to include subtle utterances, practices, silences, gestures, and rituals, then the new Saudi novel is without doubt a textual critique of society and religion, with the state remaining beyond criticism. Young women novelists promote individualism at the expense of communal and collective solidarities, religious identities, and restrictive norms. They celebrate choice rather than conformity. But they remain avid supporters of the regime and unable to see that their exclusion is partly a function of political decisions and partly a function of the political paying lip service to religion. Samar al-Moqrin launched an attack on "those Saudi liberals who criticized the King's decision to reward the religious establishment for prohibiting demonstrations on March 11, 2011. The religious establishment deserves to be strengthened and rewarded for its position in support of the ruling family and protecting the country from dissent" (al-Moqrin 2011). Her frustration with Saudi liberal men, described as hypocritical, pushes her toward endorsing one of the most conservative interpreters of Islam, who has deprived her of basic human rights. She celebrates the Saudi regime as a "silent democracy."

The novels are literary discourses that reflect the new relations of power between state and market, on one hand, and state and religious circles, on the other. They demonstrate the power of the state in dictating change in gender policy at the expense of that of religious scholars. Women novelists are not engaged in heroic acts of rebellion, as claimed by the media advertising these novels or even researchers who have dealt with similar issues in other Muslim countries.[13] The new Saudi novelists celebrate and endorse the power that both state and new economy exert over them, rather than resisting. Like the state, they consider the guardians of religious nationalism as obstacles to fully engaging with the opportunities offered by the new state/market in terms of cosmopolitan fantasies. This position, taken by many women in the last decade, is easily reversed, as Samar al-Moqrin's supporting the religious establishment demonstrates. This means that these women novelists are more likely to follow the agenda of the state than their own. Moreover, their novels express disappointment with men as fathers, brothers, husbands, and lovers who fail to live up to the expectation of the cosmopolitan fantasy. This disappointment leads some novelists

to explore the true meaning of passion, love, and understanding, thus undermining myths about Saudi men and their potency, in addition to exposing their hypocrisy.

For a long time, state, market, and religious nationalism have privileged men over women. State bureaucracy, surveillance, and resources allow greater sex segregation, leading to strict divisions between men and women, controlling the marriage choices of both but empowering men over women. Men regulate women's entry into the public sphere and their access to government bureaucracy and state benefits. In addition to state bureaucracy, extreme wealth has led to differential access to traditional support networks. This exaggerates economic inequality between men and women of the same family. Women novelists capture the new power relations between the genders: their work reflects a quest to be at the center of the new cosmopolitan fantasies. The new shopping center becomes an arena where groups of young men assert their power by simply roaming, driving, and flirting with women. On the other hand, young Saudi women resort to a sexualized femininity to lure and control men.[14] Both the state and the religious police strive to control these new spaces.

Grounded in an analysis of the power of the state, market, and religion, this gender contest, which is above all played out under state control, unfolds in contemporary Saudi women's literature and society. The sexualized femininity that is fetishized in the new consumer economy has infiltrated literature. Resistance through either violent or non-violent action may be too narrow to explain the new phenomenon of "Saudi Chick Literature." It is perhaps better to imagine a continuum of resistance. Saudi women are stretching the boundaries of the nation with their words and deeds, partly in response to state and market forces and partly in response to their quest for freedom, individuality, and choice, all a product of the country's immersion in late modernity.

Notes

1. The chapter draws on research from Madawi Al-Rasheed (2013).
2. Immediately after the publication of *Girls of Riyadh,* a novel entitled *Shabab al-Riyadh* (The Boys of Riyadh) appeared in Beirut (al-Utaibi n.d.). The novel seemingly attracted no attention.
3. An English translation of Saudi women's short stories first appeared in 1998, see Bagader et al. (1998).
4. Joseph Massad's excellent interpretation of the problem of desire and sexuality in literature captures this point when he discusses the work of Hanan al-Shaykh (Massad 2007: 347).
5. For details of Layla al-Othman's long journey through the courts to defend her novels, see al-Othman (2009).

6. For example, Iranian state and religious circles endorsed and popularized temporary marriage in the 1980s (Haeri 1989).

7. See http:www.rajaa.net.

8. Reviews of the novel in the English press highlighted its "sex" dimension. All reviews focused on acts simply alluded to rather than described, see Adil (2007), Aspden (2007), and Williams (2007).

9. In Egypt, the phenomenon is illustrated by a very successful blog turned into a book that was translated into several European languages (Abd al-Al 2008). The current marriage crisis in Egypt is discussed in many scholarly works, see Kholoussy (2010a, 2010b). For a comparison between Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, see Hasso (2010).

10. The study of youth culture in Saudi public space is captured in Wynn (1997). See also Amelie Le Renard's study of an urban girls' college in Riyadh and the ways the girls challenge restrictions in their daily shopping and consumption habits centered on the shopping mall. They can be considered real versions of the fictionalized girls in al-Sani's novel (Le Renard 2009). For an alternative view regarding youth culture, see Yamani (2000, 2010).

11. Al-Moqrin's essay is found at http://www.salmogren.net/Default.aspx (last accessed September 27, 2014).

12. Lila Abu-Lughod warns against romanticizing women's resistance expressed in subversive acts, gossip, words, and songs. She argues that this resistance should be seen as diagnostic of power (Abu-Lughod 1990). For an evaluation of scholarly work on resistance, see Ortner (1995).

13. For example, Pardis Mahdavi argues that young Iranians use sex as freedom and rebellion. This approach fails to see the wider context in which both state and market make sex appear as an act of rebellion, whereas in fact it is nothing but an endorsement of the economy of desire (Mahdavi 2009).

14. In this respect, Saudi women share the obsession with sexualized femininity of their counterparts among Awlad Ali, studied by Lila Abu-Lughod (1990).

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9
Wajdi al-Ahdal and the Broken Yemeni Nation

Søren Hebbelstrup

Yemen is on one hand a nation with a divided political history and a fragmented present, having seen experiments with the Imamate, communism, and republicanism, each coexisting with its strong tribal traditions. On the other hand, the country is marked by the presence of strong symbols of national unity, which seek to unite the different factions. The prose writer of the post-revolutionary era is faced with a fragmented nation full of contrasts, marred by analphabetism and a very limited prose literature tradition. Such tradition as does exist is closely associated with polemical writing and the formation of a national ideology. One might think that a modern prose writer would, given the failure of the national project, abandon this project altogether, and associate himself with a global intellectual and literary awareness, or set out on a purely aesthetic path.

Below, I focus on a particular Yemeni novel, *Faylusuf al-Karantina* (The Quarantined Philosopher) by Wajdi al-Ahdal from 2007. My analysis demonstrates the presence of a very different response. Rather than abandonment of the national project, the writer suggests that the artist, exactly because of the cultural poverty, has a moral responsibility similar to that in revolutionary literature. The writer needs to help heal his nation through literary commitment to its symbolic values. The difference in a post-revolutionary context is that the narrative is now focused on the artistic and intellectual class. Political and material issues are no longer focal points in visions for change. I argue that the novel reflects awareness that artists and art have a role to play in lifting the rest of the nation out of its depressed state.

History of Yemeni prose

Although the Yemeni literary community had very meager beginnings in the 1940s, its subsequent development has been prominent in the national project. On one hand, it was felt that a modern cultural class is significant to national identity formation; on the other hand, prose writers were active in the political polemic surrounding the revolutions of the 1940s. In fact, it seems the connection between *belles lettres* and political activism has been close at every turn, even though the priority between art and politics has varied. In Aden in 1939 (Ibrahim 1977: 147; Orth 2004: 26), Muhammad Ali Luqman published *Sa'id* (Happy), which is considered the first Yemeni novel. Luqman had studied in Britain in the 1920s and written several political essays focused on introducing Western advances into Yemen. Later, he became editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Fatat al-Jazira* (Girl of the Peninsula). Luqman not only wrote prose fiction himself, but through *Fatat al-Jazira* actively encouraged the publishing of prose writing by, inter alia, forming a "Literature Society." He also criticized the press of the time for its exclusively political focus and lack of interest in modern culture. Even so, *Sa'id* is mainly seen by critics and historians as social criticism in the guise of realistic narrative (Orth 2004). In addition, the periodical *al-Hikma al-Yamaniyya* (Yemeni Wisdom), which came out between 1938 and 1940, sought to invigorate cultural life in the capital by publishing short stories.

According to scholars (Ibrahim 1977; Muqalih, 'abd al-'aziz 1999; Orth 2004), much so-called prose fiction in this period was low in artistic value and often amounted to mere descriptions of actual historical events, or of conversations about life and society among personal acquaintances. Muhammad 'Abd al-Wali (1939–73), my exemplar of "classical" Yemeni political fiction, is considered by Ibrahim, Muqalih (1999) and others the first "mature" prose writer of the nation and is one of the two primary prosaists in Yemen in the twentieth century. Literary historians usually describe the period following unification and civil war in the 1990s until today as a period of literary renaissance. This trend has been promoted and financed by well-to-do philanthropists and culturally interested people in the society. The resurgence has also been spurred by the relatively free press in the 1990s, when political parties and other actors had affiliated newspapers. Newspapers published literature, and thus the tradition of close ties with journalism continued. This generation of writers included many author-journalists, but also many people with purely artistic ambitions, and the earlier literature has been

re-evaluated in terms of the traditional dichotomy of art for art's sake versus art for society.

'Abd al-Wali's *yamūtūna ġurabā'u*

The novel *yamūtūna ġurabā'u* ('Abdul-Wali 1986) (They Die as Strangers) by Muhammad 'Abd al-Wali from 1973 (written around 1962 in the revolutionary years) is considered a milestone in Yemeni prose on account of its literary qualities – it is captivating and well written – and because it engages with themes of importance to national sentiment at the time. It is second in fame – albeit a distant second – only to *al-Rahina* (The Hostage) by Zaid Mutee Dammaj from 1984. I use "They Die as Strangers" as a reference point and backdrop against which to analyze "The Quarantined Philosopher" in order to develop my main argument. I propose that the latter is part of an indigenous Yemeni tradition of political literature, but is a new offshoot with a radically new focus that reflects recent political and cultural developments.

Al-Wali was born in Ethiopia to an Ethiopian mother and North-Yemeni father, the latter sympathetic to the Free Yemeni Movement (FYM), which resisted the imam (Dresch 2000). He lived in Aden, Cairo, and Moscow and was a keen reader of both Arabic and Russian literature (Ibrahim 1977). "They Die as Strangers" revolves round the protagonist Abduh, an emigrant Yemeni living in Addis Ababa, where he tries to raise money for his family back in Yemen. He dreams of buying a big house and becoming the envy of all the neighbors. The main conflict, however, is that he has begotten a child by the young Ethiopian woman Taito. Apart from Abduh, we encounter several typical characters throughout the novel: Taito, who has had to prostitute herself, but is characterized as a noble woman; Mr. Amin, who is an imam and a representative of the Yemenis in Addis; al-Haj 'Abd al-Latif, a veteran of the 1948 coup in Yemen and very religious, and his secretary. The latter happens to be the son of an Ethiopian mother and Yemeni father and gains prominence by his closing monologue, in which he not only resolves to adopt Abduh's child, but also vows to raise him to resist the oppression in Yemen. Excited debate among the characters about the North Yemen uprising against the imam plays a big part in the novel. The discussions about moral decay among exiles, taxes, the role of religious authority appear typical and should be well known to anyone familiar with Yemeni society, and especially the Ethiopian exile. These serve to portray them as living characters, while also serving the ideological aspect of the story.

Table 9.1   Themes in "They Die as Strangers"

'They Die as Strangers'	
−	+
Oppression, injustice	Homeland, motherland
←The land as wealth, status, honor	The land as obligation→
←Traditional honor codes	
←Racial, religious, or class status	
←Wealth	Valor through responsible action→

Source: Adapted from Hebbelstrup (2004).

The story line meanwhile depicts Abduh's struggle to escape responsibility for his illegitimate child so he can realize his dream and return to his country. This produces another set of debates, as Abduh is confronted by Taito and other characters, who become involved in his problem. In this way, the moral and practical aspects of raising a bastard child become intertwined with discussions about national duties and responsibilities. Thus, the narrative[1] lines in the novel alternate with what could be called dialectical lines, and both are resolved in the novel's climax. A schematic outline of the concepts in play can be seen in Table 9.1.

This table, like Tables 9.2 and 9.3, is simply a taxonomy of the salient themes of the novel. These themes are part of the novel's "focalization" (see Genette 1980/1972; Hühn et al. 2009), that is, they focus the reader's attention on the representation of the world. Some of the themes are conceptualized the same way throughout as either desirable or undesirable, such as the imam's injustice. These ideas are the framing or background concepts in the narrative. Other concepts take on a new meaning through the action of the narrative, either moving from neutral to positive/negative or from positive or negative to the opposite. This is indicated in the table by an arrow toward either positive or negative, and these are the ideas that can be said to be the novel's message (Riceour 1989; Bal 1997; Olson 2011).

To explain the table, the nation is conceptualized as a moral obligation unconnected to ethnicity, religion, and traditional power structures or institutions. This conceptualization is achieved through the various story lines: the framing narrative of Abduh's exile; discussion of actual institutions and organizations on the Yemeni national political scene; and, allegorically, in the convergence of the main "bastard son"

Table 9.2   Plots and subplots in "The Quarantined Philosopher" I

'Quest of the Philosopher'

–	+
Worms (parasitical life)	Humanity
Bad taste	Quality
←Material wealth	Ascetism→
←Institutional power/politics	Intellectuality→
←Materialism	Spirituality→
←Oil	Water→

Table 9.3   Plots and subplots in "The Quarantined Philosopher" II

The Great Qahtani and the Lamp and Wilson vs. al-Madi

–	+
Tyranny	
Thought control	
Violence	
Manipulation	
←Light (false vision, media?)	Light (enlightenment)→
←Financial power	
←Unenlightened sectarianism	

narrative with the "exile" narrative. The nation is understood as a matter of primordial attachment. The attachment is clearly not ethnic, and is opposed to traditional tribal or religious power structures. Rather, there is a civic-republican notion of citizenry, with the nation united through mutual obligations. Differences between people based on rank, race, profession, and status are erased and the common man is elevated. He is to be judged only on his merits in the fight for the national project. Just as the ideology concerns the common man, the novel's focalization of the represented world also belongs to the common man, given that the worries and priorities of the protagonist resemble the common issues of family, wealth, unblemished reputation, and manliness. Similarly, all the themes that arise elsewhere in the story – work, sex, religious institutions, morality, wealth, exile, taxes, and children – are common.

On a related note, the novel engages directly with an actual struggle at the time, by explicitly naming the FYM, the main opposition to the Yemeni imamate, in the discussions between the characters. Additionally, the imam's oppression of the common man through his tax agents

and soldiers is mentioned in several places. It thus becomes obvious what the exertion for the sake of the homeland would mean in practice, and this does link the novel to political writing such as newspaper journalism and polemical publications. The homeland is referred to as *'arḍ* (land), with associations with a mythical entity or promised land. It is also an entity that demands physical exertion by its inhabitants and collective commitment. In this way, nation or "the land" is a foreground to religion in this novel, as was often the case in this era. The intellectual may have a prominent role in the national project – after all, Al-Wali casts his real hero, the secretary, as an ideologue – but the urgent struggle is military and material.

Religious elements (the imam and the Haj) are seen as at best ineffectual contributors to the national project. Along with the positive regard for the Christian characters, this points the way to a reduced role for Islam and tolerance for other religions and secularism. On the other hand, the story makes no negative evaluation of Islam. Some might even argue that the underlying ideology is in line with basic Islamic tenets: racial equality; nationhood based on commitment to one ideal; and an individual obligation to fight the oppressor.

Faylusuf al-Karantina

I now turn to the focal point of this chapter, Wajdi al-Ahdal's 2007 novel *Faylusuf al-Karantina* (The Quarantined Philosopher). Wajdi al-Ahdal (b. 1973) is considered one of the foremost representatives of the new generation of Yemeni prose writers. He writes novellas and "Very Short Stories," novels, and drama and has received several literary prizes and nominations. His most famous novel is *Qawarib Jabaliyya* (Mountain Ships, 2002) for which he was unjustly persecuted and ultimately expelled from Yemen, until the sentence was revoked after mediation by international personalities.

The first impression of "The Quarantined Philosopher" is that it is a political satire, as it presents Yemeni/Arabic society as a worm colony and entertainingly depicts scenes of hypocrisy, injustice, and political folly. The satirical aspect of al-Ahdal's work has been treated in the press (al-Zahrani 2005), and I briefly return to it later, but the starting point for this analysis is the narrative and thematic aspects. The main narrative in "The Quarantined Philosopher" is the quest by a Yemeni, Mish'al al-Hijazi, son of a trader. While visiting the Grave of London, he is converted from radical Islam to rationalist philosophy, and when he returns home to the Grave of Zima, he sets out to disseminate his insights to

the rest of the population through his book "Together on the Road to Humanization." The explanation for the setting of the story in graves is that it revolves around nations of worms. The worms of Zima feed on corpses and drink oil instead of water, but otherwise form a typical Middle Eastern society. The philosopher claims that by adopting his vision, the worms can gain "humanity."

The world of worms is populated by a familiar cast of character types from modern cultural and political life. The Grave of Zima is ruled by one "Great Qahtani," who resembles the stereotypical Arabic monocratic ruler of this age. He is conceited and arbitrary and plays off political figures against one another to consolidate his power. However, he is often himself exploited by clever, powerful people in their mutual struggles. The latter group includes the ambassador from the Grave of the Hamburger and the "Imam al-Madi" (a rather blunt play on *al-Imam al-Mahdi*, the prophesied leader of Muslims at the end of time) and the Arabic *māḍi* (past, bygone). The imam and ambassador are the main propellants of the dangerous political events that transpire in the Grave of Zima. The philosopher, however, gains friends along the way, the young woman Hissa and her handicapped little sister, and the former employees of a now-abandoned "Center for Scientific Studies."

The book "Together on the Road to Humanisation" has at its core a simple command: "Whatever you do, try to be the best in the world at it. If you do that, you will gain humanity." The movement sparked by this libertarian axiom actually succeeds in lifting some citizens out of the poverty and misery that plague Zima. Halfway through the novel, however, his success starts to bother some of the powerful in the country. The Great Qahtani, through the intervention of Ambassador Wilson, arrests the philosopher and jails him for 20 years.

We pick up the story after his sentence ends. The philosopher has grown miserable in prison, and when he emerges, he finds that not only are most of his former friends in a terrible state, but also that his only daughter, who has lapsed into religious conservatism, eschews him for fear of damage to her reputation. This is a heavy blow for the philosopher, who withdraws into seclusion, gives up on life, and stops eating. He almost dies, but discovers by chance that by eating his books he actually feels much healthier than before his hunger strike. He pursues this new discovery and finds that eating dead humans and drinking oil is unhealthy for the worms. He then shares this insight with his friend Hissa, with the handicapped sister and blind daughter. Hissa has become rich and successful through the liberalist philosophy, but still feels no

closer to humanity. However, it turns out that both her daughter and sister can be cured by the magic power of the new discovery, and this sparks the second rise of the philosopher. The philosopher now promotes his diet of no human flesh and oil. Instead, the worms shall eat books (become bookworms) and drink water! Drinking water is just as controversial as eating books, since there is no water to be found and oil is the standard drink in Zima. This brings us to the climax of the philosopher's story, when he and his followers set out to find a long lost source of water, hidden from the people of Zima by a grand conspiracy. Finding the source will finally allow them to rise above their sad condition and attain the state of humanity.

Parallel to this, we follow the other main characters. On the political level, there is intense deadlock between Ambassador Wilson and Imam al-Madi. Wilson is troubled by developments in the Grave of Zima after terror attacks on his "home grave." He plays a risky game by attempting to control events in Zima through his control of the Big Qahtani. However, in weakening the public resistance to domination, he also makes it easier for the Imam al-Madi to spread his ideology, an autocratic version of the "Doctrine of Sand," the main religion of The Grave of Zima.

Thematic analysis – configurations of nation and religion

Thematic analysis of "The Quarantined Philosopher" has a double purpose. First, it should highlight the concepts that are actualized by the novel. Some non-obvious themes prove to be prominent when distribution, placement, or rate of repetition are examined. Specification of these concepts will serve as background and validation for the narrative analysis that follows. Second, the thematic make-up of the novel is what connects it to pre-existing texts and contexts and is thus an indication of which national or international communities and genres it ties into. The next section provides a thematic walk through the novel based on distribution and repetition at various levels. The walk through is tentatively grouped into two major themes, one relating to nation and politics, the other to spirituality, in order to make clear how nation and religion are configured in the novel.

Nation and politics

Yemen

The nation of Zima has traces of Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Arabic world, making it hard to assert that Yemen is the novel's exclusive ideological target. What makes the story seem to be about Yemen is the

configuration of characteristics. This configuration places Zima in the same geographical place as Yemen or perhaps Yemen/Saudi Arabia and with resemblances in terms of culture (homogenous, religious), society (conservative), material wealth, power, and stability. Also strengthening the association with Yemen are symbolic names such as the great Qahtani (Qahtan being the legendary forefather of the southern Arabs (Lambert 1970). There is, incidentally, no reference to division between North and South Yemen.

Reform

The philosopher wants to bring reform to his homeland. The kind of reform is peculiar, but nevertheless this overarching theme clearly connects the text with previous Yemeni prose fiction, including twentieth-century political fiction, such as Abd al-Wali's.

East/West

The Grave of London (where al-Hijazi became a philosopher) and the Grave of the Hamburger bring the East–West dichotomy into the foreground, as do the characteristics of the two philosophies propounded by al-Hijazi, which brand the two sections of the novel. The first liberalist version is acquired in London, and the second (involving eating books and drinking water), while somewhat silly, does resemble Eastern (Buddhist and Taoist) values, especially as it is the eating of Lao Tse that gives rise to it. This duality places the novel among Arabic politically slanted *belles lettres*, since the theme of the Arab World versus the West plays such a huge part in modern Arabic literary history (Klemm 2000). But here, on the political level, the East–West dichotomy is dissolved by the equal and negative evaluation of all political agents.

Life in exile

Because the story begins with a return from abroad, the well-known concept of exile versus struggle at home is evoked. It soon becomes clear, however, that this is only a lead-in to the main story. In line with actual developments, political exertion abroad does not mean what it did in 'Abd al-Wali's 1960s (Dresch 2000). Nowadays, traveling and returning are trivial. Here, the theme of exile serves as a link to the first batch of Yemeni political literature and to Yemeni history, even though it proves to be peripheral to the story, as it does not recur in the depiction of the Zimi nation, and causes no crisis for any of the important characters.

Tyranny and injustice

The power structure in the Grave of Zima is hierarchical and cruel, and deception, false accusation, rape, and exploitation are plentiful. Thus, we hear of Imam al-Madi's upbringing by a cruel tyrannical father and the parallel story of the philosopher himself. We hear of maltreatment of children and workers and, of course, the civil war that later arises, which is as brutal and vicious as current civil wars. Tyranny, injustice, and the wish for reform are part of what makes the novel read like a political novel, that is, part of its modal configuration. They may also make the novel appeal more to potential readers, as the wish to eliminate tyranny serves as a major source of identification with the protagonist and his quest.

Water and oil

The beginning of the story describes empathetically how the return-ing philosopher, suffering from thirst, tries to quench it with Red Sea water, which makes him even thirstier. He then discovers that water is prohibited in the Grave of Zima. This is the situation when the reader first encounters the protagonist and several elements in the plot. Water is then a primary recurring theme. Of course, the second part of the philosopher's mission is all about finding water, and the story ends with an ecstatic rush of freshwater from the hid-den source. Water, such an important issue in Arab and Yemeni daily life since Himyari times, is fundamental to the novel's vision for the nation. Water shortages in Yemen are potentially catastrophic and an important development issue. Additionally, water is a prominent symbol of Yemeni ancient civilization and hence imbued with cul-tural significance, so we might see the novel as a continuation of that link.

Oil is likewise an important topic in Arabic daily life and has unusual significance in this novel. Early on, the philosopher, in an almost cere-monial act of submission to the new ways of Zima, accustoms his body to drinking oil instead of water. It is the Big Qahtani, the despot, who personally oversees this, and his power is closely linked to this habit. The special significance of oil is in this way clearly presented to the reader as the antithesis of water and a debasing influence on the human soul and society. Oil drives the artificial sun that lights up the Grave of Zima. This sun was created and is maintained and managed by the Big Qahtani by a remote control device.

Religion and spirituality

Religion and Islam are represented in the form of "The Doctrine of Sand," the religion most Zimis adhere to. It appears in relation to Imam al-Madi's exploitation of religious belief in his power struggles, and as the background to the philosopher's journey to England (whither he is sent as a missionary by a fanatical religious group). Dubbing Islam "The Doctrine of Sand" certainly seems poignant, especially as the idea of creating the artificial lamp is said to come from the creator of the doctrine, ibn Zima, owing to his "preference for imitating things." Statements such as these do not elaborate the doctrine, so I would argue that Islam as such is hardly a theme in the novel. The focus is on religious personalities, institutions, and authorities rather than doctrine itself, with the Imam al-Madi, his ties to terror, and his ability to mobilize destructive forces in society in the foreground. Also relevant here is the moral anxiety of the philosopher's daughter, who fears the shame associating with him will bring upon here.

Philosophy/Humanism

The first part of the novel paints a comical picture of the philosopher as a professional. In England, Al-Hijazi is converted to Western philosophy from radical Islamism. Returning to Zima, he enthusiastically enters a place signposted as the Center of Human Ascension, only to find that it is an East Asian restaurant. He then opens a shop for philosophical counsel and is depicted as a guru, a wise man with esoteric knowledge whom people consult in search of miraculous solutions to various problems. Specific philosophers are used in the clinic: for instance, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer from the West and Lao Tse and Zhang Zai from the East. This comical description of the philosopher as a professional diminishes philosophy's depth or the commitment to a specific philosophy, and instead focuses attention on the act of self-development and search for metaphysical values.

"Together on the Road to Humanization" is the title of the philosopher's book. Intriguingly, however, the philosopher doesn't himself know exactly what is meant by "humanity." Thus, his experiment in "The Grave of Zima" is based on a subjective revelatory vision, which is clarified through the novel. The concept of humanism is also made concrete by choosing animal protagonists. This promotes the concept of humanism by concretizing humanity as a coveted goal and also incidentally ties the story to animal fables common in the Arabic literary heritage.[2] Humanism as philosophical theme is perhaps not in the

foreground for the common Yemeni, but is certainly found in modern Yemeni literature (see recent anthologies such as Afif 2000; also Khusbak 1996).

Taste

Setting the world in a grave with worms, besides creating a post-apocalyptic atmosphere, evokes disgust and bad taste in the reader. The worms eat only human flesh of different flavors (dates, kebab, fish, etc.) and drink oil instead of water, which disgusts the philosopher. The amount of time spent on issues of taste is conspicuous, and contributes to a vision of the world based on aesthetic values. Taste as a theme lends meaning to the philosopher's first reform attempt, namely, the philosophy of perfecting your trade. As such, it aligns the main trajectory of the story with a search for qualitative improvement.

Literature and art

Also adding to the intellectualist strand is the portrayal of literature and art as objects of interest throughout the book. In the first part, al-Hijazi's philosophical treatise ("Together on the Road to Humanization") becomes the object of both adoration and censorship, with the focus on "owning" and "distributing" the book, thereby suggesting an interest in the writer–publisher–reader production chain. Other examples include al-Hijazi's meditating at length over a statue of the Big Qahtani; mention of the author's nervous sensitivity; and Ambassador Wilson's discussing cultural policies with the Big Qahtani, namely, the idea to distribute books in toilets across the nation, since toilets are "important cultural places."

Material wealth/capitalism

Material poverty is a salient feature of the Grave of Zima, where immigrant workers die of neglect and the arrogance of the Zimi establishment toward them, and the Center of Scientific Research is incapacitated by lack of funding. The philosophy that Mish'al al-Hijazi initially brings home is a libertarian view of individualism and progress. So money and wealth are not negatively evaluated, but are eventually irrelevant to the fulfillment of the philosopher's desires.

Summary of thematic analysis

On an emotional level, the represented world is characterized by spiritual dearth, violence, deception, inhumanity, and lack of culture. Every aspect of society in the Nation of Zima is grim, dominated by illness,

decay, and poverty at a societal level and injustice and violence at many levels. This depiction of Yemen is unfortunately common in Yemeni writing. On a material level, water and oil are juxtaposed as complementary. The marked configuration of these themes draws attention to their unusual significance, and actualizes the history of the Arabian Peninsula and current resource scarcity and international dependency. Political, economic, and religious power are not significantly different, as they are equally expressed through tyranny, injustice, and corruption. Opposition to all this is a spirituality based on humanistic, artistic curiosity and interest in philosophy and aesthetic quality.

The main conception of Yemeni-ness in 'Abd al-Wali's earlier novel "They Die as Strangers," namely, migration and "earth," are present in "The Quarantined Philosopher," but peripheral to the progression of the story. The exile of Mish'al al-Hijazi is not treated in depth and has no influence on the plot. Migration is no longer the main crisis but merely an element in a complex situation that may have both positive and negative outcomes. "Earth" in "The Quarantined Philosopher" is likewise not an object of value, even though it is omnipresent. These themes instead function modally as intertextual markers, which signal to any reader of Arabic or Yemeni literature what kind of story this is, and how it should be read. In this light, the new ideas presented stand out more clearly: namely, that a transformation of the nation can begin as an individual process of enlightenment, education, and spiritual awakening. Where Abduh al-Wali is concerned with matters familiar to the wide public and the common man, in his national project al-Ahdal's scope seems much more limited. The focalization of the world of the worms is largely unrelated to common material issues: we are presented with sophisticated themes such as high-level diplomacy, the dealings of the science community, and so on. Material matters, such as earth and politics, are only treated with their traditional meanings warped. This view is further enhanced by examining the way the plot progresses.

Plotlines in 'The Quarantined Philosopher'

Those themes or concepts that help shape the twists in the story line are of particular interest here. When concepts are made the object of knowledge-acquisition, intent, and the actions of "human agencies," they can be said to be "affected by the narrative" in a narratological sense (Riceour 1989; Fludernik 1996). Hence, these conceptualizations can be understood as the "point" or "message" of the novel, where other themes work on other levels (modal, interpersonal). In the schematic

representation of the main plot and subplots above, the impact – depicted by how concepts take on new meaning through the action of the narrative, either moving from neutral to positive/negative or from either positive or negative to the opposite – is again noted by an arrow.

There are two overarching and interconnected plots: the philosopher's mission or quest, and the struggle between Imam al-Madi and Ambassador Wilson, the main human agency being the philosopher, of course. His primary knowledge-acquisition occurs in the novel's major anticlimax, when al-Hijazi is released from prison. In total despair, he starts reading and later eating books of Eastern philosophy. Then he disregards his bodily needs and from this moment the story is an enraptured ascent ending in spiritual fulfillment and humanity. This climax places the ideas of enlightenment and education at the forefront of the view of national reform; and simultaneously makes asceticism, alienation, and even nerdy eccentricity a central aspect of individual spiritual transformation.

On the political level, Imam al-Madi's power continues to increase and his ties to terrorism become more overt. The intrigue is largely about who gets to control the Great Qahtani's remote hold over an oil-powered artificial sun that lights up the Grave of Zima. The important turn occurs when Imam al-Madi is powerful enough to instigate the massacre of his nemesis, Ambassador Wilson. This has a number of outcomes, the most important being that the land is beset by poverty and then civil war. A schematic representation of the main plot and the subplot could thus look like this.

From the thematic walk through, it becomes clear that religious, economic, and political powers are one and the same. From the way the plot turns, this institutional power becomes associated with deception and the unenlightened sectarianism of civil war. The opposition to this is enlightenment, artistic curiosity, good taste, asceticism, and a collective in which the leader leads by example. To paraphrase the plot, immediate material concerns must be rejected on both the personal and societal levels, and a focus on education and renewed spirituality are the most urgent societal needs.

Conclusion

On a modal level,[3] "The Quarantined Philosopher" is structured like earlier Yemeni political narratives: it portrays injustice and provides the human experience of a quest for some symbolic value that enhances understanding of some societal issue. However, the novel is clearly not

mainly concerned with the social or political direction of the nation, nor with religion as a component of the national identity. The only traditional theme (like the ones that appear in *yamūtūna ġurabā'u*) is the slight socialist slant in the depiction of futile financial gains. In fact, themes that were previously integral to political literature "earth" and "exile" are relegated to the backdrop for the main plot. The focalization of the world of Zima is similarly aligned to a literate and aesthetic worldview.

A cursory reading of the novel might label it as subversive. It is sarcastic, and most recognizable power structures in actual Yemeni society, including the religious establishment and international diplomacy, are either derided as ineffective or shown to be destructive. But this would be a relevant label only if the model reader were the non-intellectual "common man." However, since the narrative development turns on concepts far removed from the "common man's" priorities and sensibilities, it hardly speaks to him. Additionally, the novel's sarcastic tenor and its very intertextuality also make the work accessible to people of the pen, while distancing it from common priorities. In a literary, intellectual social context, then, the book does not break down symbols but rather aesthetically employs ideas that are already broken: the religious, political, and diplomatic authorities have lost their prestige; national coherence is long gone; and so on. Instead, the action focuses on the potential of art and literature as a positive force in a broken nation, a nation in which aesthetic and literary values seem few and far between.

All this obviously labels "The Quarantined Philosopher" as elitist, a term with some negative connotations. However, in a cultural context where the literary class has barely existed because of illiteracy, persecution, and the demand for engagement in societal issues, the issue of artistic autonomy becomes pertinent, if the world of art and the intellectual is to provide real alternatives to dominant discourses. The work makes this point doubly: it envisions the artist and intellectual at their most marginalized and weak in a world in which physical power dominates and symbolic authority has been lost by even the institutions entrusted with spiritual guidance. It then lets the philosopher bring forth a new foundation for national symbolism. Second, the book itself is an example of an aesthetic rendering of political and historical issues, where themes taken from Yemeni literary history and legend are re-evaluated as part of an intellectual and aesthetic agenda.

Wajdi al-Ahdal has investigated the role of the creative and intellectual class in Yemeni society before, in interviews (Dahir 2004), and in prose (al-Ahdal 2001, 2006) such as the short story "My Annoying Nose" (al-Ahdal 2001). Here, he writes about an extraordinarily keen nose that is making life miserable for him by revealing uncomfortable truths about other people: either taboos like a woman's period or the sweat of fear in people of authority, and so on. This story compares with "The Quarantined Philosopher" as an avenue for debating the synesthetic sensitivity of the artist and his fated role of depicting the elements of society from a different perspective. Given that the latter narrative, while not nationalistic, is still clearly Yemeni in the configuration of its themes and its intertextual aspects, it engages with the national identity and the role of religious and secular authorities in it. Religious institutions, together with several secular ones, are clearly described as divisive and destructive forces in society, even though the effects of this destruction are deliberately shown from the perspective of the artist/intellectual.

It remains to ask what it means in a politically challenged country like Yemen for literature to limit its field and tenor to the cultural class and the domain of the artist or intellectual. This may be seen as a losing cause and a turning away from society. But rather like the novel depicts narratively, an autonomous intellectual class, whose art is based on aesthetic rather than on direct political or societal considerations, might provide a real alternative to dominant, petrified notions of culture in society as a way of uplifting the nation.

Notes

1. I follow narratologists such as Nielsen (as outlined in Alber and Heinze 2011) in understanding the relationship between the narration and the represented world, that is, "the world is written in order to experience its disruption."
2. Such as the Indian *Kalila wa-Dimna,* translated into Arabic in the eighth century.
3. The terms "field," "mode," and "tenor" are from the text-linguistic tradition of Halliday (1989). See also Eggins (2004).

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10

Popular Religion and the Entry into Political Modernity as Seen in *The Last of the Angels*

Sami Zubaida

In public and academic discourses on Islam and nationalism/ nation-building, official/orthodox and ideological forms of the religion are privileged. Popular religion, involving mysticism and magic, saint-worship, and ritual, while acknowledged, is often relegated in these contexts. Nationalists and nation-builders, whether religious or secular, have been almost unanimous in their denunciation and denigration of popular religion as "backward," superstitious, and corrupt. Wahhabis and Kemalists converged on this issue, as did modern reformists from Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) to Muhammad Mursi (until recently president of Egypt, from the Muslim Brotherhood). One of the first measures of the Muslim Brotherhood government installed in Egypt in 2013 was the imposition of restrictions on Sufi ceremonies and disallowing mosque space for *zikr* sessions. Yet historically and until recent times and into our own days, most believers could be characterized as religious *bricoleurs*, bringing together different elements and themes from a repertoire of syncretism, Sufism, ritual, and magic for instrumental objectives of health, wealth, and happiness as well as piety (see Zubaida 2009: 99–120). How did this popular mindset enter, if at all, into articulation with social and political modernity and fuse with ideologies and actions? The novel under consideration delves into these themes, among others.

Akhir al-Mala'ika (The Last of the Angels, 1992)[1] written by Fadhil al-Azzawi in the late 1980s, is set in Kirkuk in the 1940s and 1950s (with hazy dating of events) in Iraq under the monarchy and British influence, if not tutelage. The bloody 1958 coup that displaced the monarchy

comes in at the end of the novel, portrayed in apocalyptical and dark colors.

Kirkuk is one of the main locations of petroleum production, carried out by the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), a British outfit, a dominant presence in the city from the 1930s. Demand for labor brought many migrants to the city from the surrounding, mainly Kurdish, region. Urban growth and the IPC presence transformed the city, with many new neighborhoods and appendages: fine housing for company management, residential estate for local technical and clerical employees, housing for permanent workers, and slums and shanties for the many marginals and migrants attracted by the oil boom. It also led to social and labor unrest and violence, to political contests and the politicization of ethnic differences. The IPC had its own security and intelligence bureau, but overall control of security and coercion fell to Iraqi government police and military (Fuccaro 2015; Batatu 1978: 622–627; Bayraqdar 2011).

Kirkuk is a city with a special character in terms of ethnic mix. It has a prominent Turcoman population, dominant in the culture and politics of the city. Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, and Jews are also present, all with their particular locations in the topography of the city. Labor migration, as noted, altered the ethnic balance with the influx of many Kurds and Arabs. From the 1970s, under the Ba'ath regime the demography was manipulated by forced population movement in order to Arabize the city by settling Arabs from the south and forcing some Kurds out. After the removal of that regime by the allied invasion in 2003, ethnic tensions intensified, with Kurdish claims to include the city in their autonomous region fiercely resisted by the central government and the Arab and Turcoman population. The conflict continues.

The author, Fadhil al-Azzawi, is a native of Kirkuk, born there in 1940, and the novel is partly autobiographical. He is a notable poet and novelist, a prominent member of what became known as the "Kirkuk Group" (*jama'at karkuk*), an informal group of writers, artists, and musicians (Ghassani 2003). They started their association at secondary schools in the city, reading, writing, and debating ideas and works in world literature, philosophy, and politics, accessible through translations and summaries. Though most of them were of Turcoman ethnicity, they operated, for the most part, in Arabic. They had generally leftist sympathies and inclinations, but few had any political party affiliation. They nevertheless suffered persecution and imprisonment for their work at various points, most notably at the hands of the Ba'ath regimes, first in 1963, then after 1968. By the 1960s, most of

them had moved to Baghdad and engaged in various literary, journalistic, and artistic pursuits with much intellectual excitement. They took up European intellectual trends, notably existentialism. The Baghdad episode ended after 1968 and the advent of the new Ba'ath regime, which was highly intolerant and repressive of intellectual and political pursuits beyond its control. Most of the members ended up in exile, mainly in Germany, where al-Azzawi resides, but also as far afield as Australia and Costa Rica. Perhaps the best known member of the group, apart from Azzawi, is Sargon Boulus, poet, of Assyrian origin, who died in Berlin in 2007. Anwar al-Ghassani, poet and writer, is the chronicler of the group. Members of this group continued their sentimental attachment to the city, celebrated by them as the location of multiethnic, multicultural cosmopolitanism, a fine example of what the whole of Iraq could have been. Their sadness is the passage of this idealized state into fierce conflict and violence, brought about by the political turbulence of the country. As we shall see, the novel under discussion mirrors these images of the city, starting with portrayal of the intimate and humorous coexistence of the many communities at the beginning, even through the agitation and violence of events, and ending in apocalyptical darkness following the "revolutions" and the oppressive regimes that followed.

The novel is written in the style of comic magic realism, often satirizing popular culture, government, politics, and religion. Fantastic episodes punctuate and direct the narrative, but the characters and situations are the real people and events of the time and place. The style and the tone change in the last chapters into dark and apocalyptical episodes and a hectic narrative that is not wholly coherent. The setting is the neighborhood, *mahalla*, of Chaqur, a popular quarter that seems to be primarily Turcoman. The dialogue is narrated in literary Arabic, with occasional Turkish names and expressions. It also reveals ethnic stereotypes: Arabs are "traitors," *kha'in*, having betrayed the Ottoman Turks and the *umma* of Islam in World War I. They are also dirty and do not wash their backsides. Kurds are not very clever; Jews (at that point, most of them emigrating to Israel) have the darkest and most effective magic. Yet they all seem to interact, often amicably, and the conflicts are not along ethnic lines. As we shall see, the Iraqi Communist Party and the oil workers' union constitute melting pots for all the ethnicities: they are the seeds of a national formation. However, they are also subjected to biting satire.

The narrative starts with one of the main characters of Chaqur, Hamid Nylon, and the episode in which he acquires this designation. Hamid

is fired from his job as a chauffeur to an IPC engineer, and it is not entirely clear why, except that it is to do with Hamid making advances on Mrs McKinley, his boss's wife. He has been driving her to various amorous assignations with other Englishmen. Being a womanizer and a tough guy, he decides to have a go himself, and proceeds by offering her a gift of nylon stockings. Henceforth, he becomes Hamid Nylon. The protests against his dismissal engulf Chaqur and merge with union activities and an eventual strike (a real event in 1946). The strike leads to a confrontation and a battle with the police, in which workers and police suffer casualties, and is broken with the arrest of the leaders. Hamid is politicized through these episodes, flirts with the communists, and later embarks on revolutionary plans, but that is to come.

Let us review the other main characters: Khider Musa, brother-in-law of Hamid, who starts as sheep trader, shopkeeper, and butcher, is assiduous in making money and keeping it, then goes bankrupt and undergoes a personal transformation, becoming ascetic and spiritual. A fantastic trip to the Soviet Union to retrieve his brothers lost in World War I, returning with them by zeppelin, makes him a local hero, and his fame reaches the king, who meets him on a visit to Kirkuk (the young King Faisal II and his regent did visit Kirkuk in 1953). He is cast as one of the elderly mystic trio who follow the city's fates: the others are Dede Hijri, the Turcoman poet, and Darwish Bahloul, an earthly character assumed by Death in an encounter with Khider.

Zayn al-Abidin al-Qadiri is the *imam* of the local mosque. He becomes an accidental hero when he turns a demonstration in support of Hamid Nylon into a prayer session for rain after a long drought, and the rain comes plentifully before the prayer is over. But he faces a dilemma in his naivety about politics and attempt to be on the right side. Praise for the English for doing good work in the city threatens his credentials with the radicals of the quarter, so he preaches a sermon against the English, which in turn gets him into trouble with the police. He is arrested, accused of communism, and threatened. He promises not to dabble in politics again, but the police attempt to recruit him as an informer on the communists infiltrating the mosque. He excuses himself, but offers the services of his student and assistant, a young Kurd. This latter is later revealed to be a secret communist himself. Qadiri achieves elevated status and wealth in the fantastic events that follow.

Burhan Abdalla is Hamid's nephew, the wonder boy who performs brilliantly at school and is a budding intellectual, writer, and mystic. The author confirmed in an interview that this boy is modeled on himself.

Burhan happens upon mystical communications with three angels who carry the Spring, bestowing it or taking it away. He is also led into a house among the ruins inhabited by little angels who foretell the future and answer questions. In the closing chapters, with the apocalypse that follows the 1958 revolution, Burhan leaves on wide travels spanning the world, but mostly in Germany, the author's place of exile, returning to the city after 46 years, like the author, to witness terrible events, and, at the very end, is elevated as one of the last of the angels.

Deli Ihsan is the local madman who wanders the streets and speaks to invisible interlocutors in outbursts. He is believed to be one of the *jinn* and to have magical powers. This is confirmed by Haji Ahmad al-Sabounchi, the local rich man, who, hearing whispering in the night, observes his cat speaking to another being. He follows the two as they walk through the alleyways and is led to a great feast and ceremony of *jinn*, in which Deli Ihasan is officiating.

There is a host of other colorful characters. Abbas Pahlawan is the local tough guy, rumored to pour arak over his rice. Mahmud al-Arabi is the neighborhood burglar, the protector of the quarter from other thieves. He is much disturbed by a wave of burglaries in Chaqur, denied by all the other thieves in the city and blamed by the inhabitants on *jinn* and devils. Faruq Shamil is a communist activist, and Hamid's link to the secret party office. Women characters are not well drawn. They are the wives and mothers, often strong and dominant, but not the movers of the events.

Episodes

Khider Musa's Soviet adventure: After his transformation into the spiritual life, Khider receives psychic messages from his two lost brothers, conscripted into the Ottoman army in the Great War, and drafted to the Caucasus, where they disappeared, presumed dead. Khider resolves to travel to Soviet lands and he leaves Kirkuk on foot, despite his wife's repeated efforts to drag him back. He makes a dramatic reappearance in the city, flying in a balloon and accompanied by his siblings. He found them in Tashkent, and the authorities there facilitated their travel as a propaganda coup. Communication with locals in Tashkent was facilitated by their common Turkish language. This episode makes Khider a hallowed hero and saint. News of his feat reaches Baghdad, and when King Faisal II visits Kirkuk he requests a meeting with him. Khider and the other notables of Chaqur are admired by the young king, which

encourages them to request an audience at a later date when faced with
the issue of the road through the cemetery.

The project to build a road through the cemetery

The IPC announced its project to route a new road through the ceme-
tery adjoining Chakur, where the ancestors and saints are buried. This
provoked outrage and vociferous protests, petitions, and delegations to
the *mutasarrif* (governor) and police chief. Then a brilliant idea came
to the assembly, that given the cordial sentiments expressed toward the
elders by the young king on his visit, they should request an audience
with him, which is duly agreed to by court officials in a (comic) tele-
phone call. A delegation of the elders led by Khider, and driven in the
car by Hamid, sets off for Baghdad. They are followed by delegations
from various communities and organizations in the city in other cars.
There follow bizarre and comic events during their journey and sojourn
in Baghdad, the elders people-watching in the cafes and Hamid and his
companion in the brothel area in the Maidan. They turn up at the court
and are led into a reception hall and told to wait, which they do for
some hours with no sign of the king. The elders then take matters into
their own hands and exit into the gardens where they find the king in
a tennis outfit exercising. He recognizes Khider and seems pleased and
surprised to see him, and calls off the guards. The upshot is that the king
is sympathetic to their quest, but says the matter is not in his hands and
that he will have a word with the prime minister, Nouri Pasha. They
return, after shopping for clothes in Suq al-Haraj, a bric-a-brac and old
clothes market. This episode is of particular interest, as it shows the won-
der and desires of the provincials in the capital, and the importance of
the capital, the location of the king, in the imagination of their place
in the nation. The topography of the city is iconic in their imagination
and desires: the Maidan, central location and entrance to the brothel
district; the *suq*s of Shorja and Haraj; the mosques and shrines; and the
royal palace.

Meanwhile, in Kirkuk, while the plans for the road are on hold pend-
ing the outcome of the delegation, the contractors are moving their
machinery across the cemetery, thereby convincing the people that
the work is proceeding and provoking violent riots and attacks on the
police. One policeman, pursued by the crowd, fires his gun into the air
to scare them, but the stray bullet hits the barber dozing on a chair out-
side his shop and kills him instantly. The barber is Qara Qul Mansour, of

black African descent (as the name in Turkish indicates, *qara qul* literally meaning black slave). He is immediately declared a martyr, and that is the start of another episode.

Qara Qul Mansour's ascent to heaven

The funeral of the martyr that evening becomes the occasion for further demonstrations and attacks on the police. Then there is an extraordinary manifestation: the skies open to reveal a shaft of light and Qara Qul is seen ascending from his freshly made tomb to heaven along the shaft. In the excitement and the melee that follows, the crowds discover the body is still there. Imam al-Qaderi opines that it was his soul that ascended. The body and tomb of the now *wali* (saint) becomes valuable property, and men from an outlying (Kurdish) village of Tawuq kidnap the body and are hotly pursued by police and tough guys from Chaqur, who recover the body after its carrier loses his footing on a hill and the naked corpse slides in the mud to be recovered and returned to the grave. The grave, of course, becomes a shrine of pilgrimage and intercession: minor miracles and cures are reported. Pilgrims come from all over the country and from as far afield as India and Central Asia, bringing money and gifts with them, a bounty for the city and Chaqur. The shah of Iran bestows valuable gifts, to be matched by the king of Saudi Arabia. The issue then arises of whom to appoint as overseer and manager of the tomb. Khider Musa, now an influential notable, sponsors Mulla Zain al-Abidin al-Qaderi for the job. He, in turn, appoints Hamid and Abbas as assistants and supervisors. The *mulla* installs himself in an office adjoining the shrine, bizarrely seated or reclining in a coffin. The money and gifts are stored by the *mulla* in pots buried in the garden of his house, to be kept as the wealth of Muslims. Hamid and Abbas recruit the aid of the thief Mahmud to break into the barrier surrounding the tomb to filch some of the money and gold that are thrown directly into the tomb. The widow of Qara Qul, a woman of bad repute, comes on the scene, pushed by a party opposed to Qadiri, to demand that the revenues from the shrine should accrue to her and her children, and starts proceedings against the *mulla* to recover the money. Acrimony and fights follow. Khider Musa urges Qadiri to dispense gifts and grants from the buried treasure to officials and notables, but the latter is adamant that he is keeping it all for the Muslims, and he falls out with Musa. In desperation one night, Qadiri seeks out the widow's house to negotiate, only to spy through the door a group of men chatting over tea: Qara Qul himself with Darwish Bahlul (Death) and the poet. He loses his mind and

is distracted and wordless, except to repeat: "I have seen it all." After a few days, he retires to his coffin and dies. No one can find the buried treasure.

The revolution

Hamid Nylon has the idea of trying to find the money in order to finance the revolution. The idea of the revolution had grown in his head since his involvement in the struggles against the IPC and the police and his dealings with the union and the strikes and ultimately the Communist Party. But he had been disappointed by the reluctance of the communists to be involved in the insurrection.

The Iraqi Communist Party is satirized in the novel. Hamid, through his contacts, is led to the secret headquarters of the party in a seemingly ruined building in an old slum, guarded by a knowing serpent, but revealing an interior of sumptuous offices with modern equipment and an alluring young woman secretary. He is welcomed as a recruit, but his idea of organizing a peasant revolt, following the example of Mao, is rejected as premature and contrary to Soviet interests and plans for the area, all expressed in the then current jargon. It also transpired, in passing, that the Communist Party had organized a *fatiha* ceremony in a mosque to mourn the death of Joseph Stalin. Hamid leaves in disgust and decides to start the revolution on his own. The prospect of the Qara Qul treasure spurs him to action. He recruits the boy Burhan, who has a reputation for literary composition and earns an income writing love letters for stricken illiterate women. Burhan casts Hamid's manifesto in high literary style and cogent argument.

Hamid chooses the village of Tawuq, disappointed in the quest for Qara Qul's body, as the starting nucleus of the peasant revolutionary army. He arrives at the village dressed in a pseudo-military uniform and giving his assumed *nom du guerre* a military title. The men who had kidnapped the body and were sought by the police had become a gang of outlaws in the hills above the village. Hamid's promises of restoring the sacred body to the village and of further bounty convince the elders to lead him to the men, who are equally taken. The promise of regular pay for the revolutionary fighters brings many more villages and men into the revolution, and attracts the support of Kurdish tribes and Arab nomads. But the treasure is still illusive, until the boy Burhan uses his supernatural connections to locate it, and the troops are paid. Skirmishes with the police don't seem to impress the authorities with the revolutionary threat, so Hamid resorts to a bold move to enter the IPC

compound at night, disarm the sleepy guards, and kidnap a number of British personnel, including his erstwhile object of desire Mrs McKinley, who on this occasion responds ardently to Hamid's macho actions. Ultimately, in the effort to rescue the hostages, the authorities appear to make concessions to the "rebels" by enlisting them in the regular army and giving Hamid an officer's rank, which proves to be a trick to disarm and imprison them. Hamid is only released after the "revolution" of 1958.

The history

To come back to the real world, the 1958 revolution ushered in a period of turmoil, which was especially disastrous for Kirkuk and Mosul. Abdul-Karim Qasim, the leader of the 1958 coup and president till his assassination in 1963, at first favored the communists partly as a bulwark against the nationalists, who were trying to oust him in order to join the then United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria (Batatu 1978: 764–890; Tripp 2007: 143–85). This communist/nationalist conflict was superimposed in the north on the old ethnic antagonism between Kurds and Turcomans. Those latter, while not keen on an Arab unity including Iraq, sided with the nationalists against the Kurds, allied to the communists. In 1959, an attempted coup by a nationalist officer in Mosul led to an intense and ugly conflict in the two cities. This was followed after a few months by another conflagration in Kirkuk over the composition of the parades celebrating the anniversary of the revolution, in which the dominant communist Kurds elbowed out the Turcomans, leading to violent clashes in which many were killed (Fuccaro in press). In 1963, Qasim was overthrown and killed in a Ba'athist coup, the Ba'athist's then engaging in a massacre of communists and their allies, with complex maneuvers toward the Kurds, which culminated in another Kurdish rebellion. In short, Iraq after 1958 was thrown into spasms of conflict and violence, culminating in the return of the Ba'ath in 1968 and ultimately the Saddam Hussein regime, which achieved, for a while, some stability through intensified repressive violence.

These events are reflected in the closing chapters of the novel in the form of apocalyptical sequences. The central character in these chapters becomes the erstwhile boy Burhan. Kirkuk and the characters in the book are engulfed in the violent oscillations between communists and nationalists, Qasim and his opponents. The narration of the events becomes sketchy, brief, and chaotic, departing from the style of the earlier sections. The tale culminates with Burhan coming back to Kirkuk

after 46 years of exile, paralleling the author's own movements, mostly to Germany. There are two equally fantastic or phantasmagorical phases of his return: one when the city had become paradise on earth, with bounty and harmony and happiness all round, a messianic dream. It is then transformed into messianic hell, with death and destruction all around, visited by tiny people in green uniforms, who prove to be Gog and Magog, the mythical destroyers in the apocalyptical scenarios. As Burhan lifts his arms to heaven, they turn into wings and he flies, the last angel.

Imagining the nation

The focus of the novel is the *mahalla* of Chaqur. The characters are socially located within the dense weft of that local community, with a strong sense of local identity. Its links to the surrounding world are various, sometimes tentative. The characters imagine this world in multiple and shifting contexts, employing a kind of ideational *bricolage* of religion, politics, ethnic identity, and proto-nationalism. They fit with Benedict Anderson's characterization of pre-nationalist imagination: a local community imagining the world as a series of similar communities within an imagined universal religious community, the *umma* or Christendom (Anderson 1991: 12–19). One stereotype is of the Arab as traitor to the *umma* of Islam for having fought the Ottoman caliphate, with ethnic loyalty superimposed. Religion then has two dimensions: identity, or belonging to the universal Islamic *umma*, and instrumental, or seeking wealth, health, and happiness through a popular mix of ritual, magic, and saint worship. All these characteristics then connect to the various elements of the developing national and international.

The IPC is a towering reality over Kirkuk: employer and bringer of bounty to its workers (high pay); a colonial and alien presence; personnel who are glamorous as well as amoral infidels; and a major force in reshaping the social and geographical contours of the city. And it is in this latter capacity that the IPC road project through the cemetery engenders the cataclysmic events of the narrative. These events lead to the delegation to see the king, revealing one line in the national narrative, as well as the portrayal of Baghdad, as the national and modern other to Kirkuk. The attention of the king was previously drawn by Khider Musa's fantastic adventure in the balloon, with traces of World War I and accounts of the Soviet Union.

The Communist Party is the most direct avenue of national imagination: it is the main political entity for the expression of discontent with

the intrusion of modern governance and impositions, and it is the only "national" body, apart from, perhaps, the king. It is national because it is open to all religions and ethnicities, which also makes it a target for conservative and religious hostility. The police spread the word that communism is about the sharing of women, all to be available every Friday. Yet the communists mourn Joseph Stalin in a *fatiha* ceremony in the mosque. The Communist Party is represented in the novel as a timid revolutionary movement, talking revolution but paralyzed by political calculations and subservience to the Soviets: the communists are only good at being prisoners and martyrs, and much of their folklore has to do with prison and sacrifice. Hamid Nylon's insurrectionary plans are rejected by the party and he resorts to direct action. Hamid's critique and revolutionary plans mirror what actually occurred in Iraq in the 1960s, when a Maoist faction of the Communist Party made a similar critique of the timidity and subservience of the central committee, and split into a revolutionary faction calling itself the central leadership. The faction organized insurrectionary activities in the southern marshes, but the peasants there weren't quite convinced and the insurrection came to nothing, except that many were killed and imprisoned (Batatu 1978: 1062–72). The Communist Party, however, played a crucial role in bringing together the diverse elements of the Iraqi population in a common quest, however mismanaged. Other "progressive" leftist and secular forces and organizations, such as the National Democratic Party, followed in its footsteps. It was a crucial avenue for the imagination of the national entity of Iraq, however precarious.

In this narrative, religion seems to play hardly any part in the transition to national modernity. It imbued the lives and thoughts of the Chaqur inhabitants, but mostly as ritual, magic, *jinn* and devils, and the veneration of saints. We are now accustomed to discourses on religion as a conduit to modern politics, nationalism, and political Islam: these are almost totally absent from the narrative. It is true that political Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, came to play a part in the political field of many Middle Eastern countries, notably Egypt, from the turn of the twentieth century. But in Iraq, the main religious thrust in politics came from Shiʿite institutions and leaders, dovetailing with nationalist ideologies and movements. Did this bypass Kirkuk of the 1950s? Credibly, for Kirkuk was predominantly Sunni. Shiʿi (or Qizilbash) Turcomans did exist, but mostly in Telafar near Mosul, and a few in Kirkuk. Sunni clerics, such as the *mulla* al-Qadiri, were, for the most part, quiescent and careful, as we see in this narrative.

Literature and sociology

This novel relates to sociological questions regarding the transition to political modernity and the tentative transformations of mentalities and identities predominantly anchored in the local to wider horizons. It serves to illustrate the forms of "mentality" and their mutations. These are not total and definitive transformations from one form to another, but a range of mixing and articulations relating to context and situation. More specifically, the novel portrays the trajectory of Iraqi politics and society in the twentieth century through the lives and thoughts of people in a *mahalla* in the city of Kirkuk, distinguished by its ethnic plurality and the centrality of the oil industry, strategic dimensions of the destiny of the country.

Note

1. The chapter refers to the original Arabic version of the book entitled *Akhir al-Mala'ika* (al-'Azzawi 1992). There is an English translation entitled *The Last of the Angels* (al-Azzawi 2008).

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Part IV

11
Utopia and Dystopia in Early-Modern Persian Literature: Representations of the Advent of Modernity to Iran

Claus Valling Pedersen

This chapter examines how literature may be a representation of a society in turbulent transition, in this case of the advent of modernity to what was formerly called Persia, but which soon became the national state of Iran. It is not a study of the connection between literature and the nation-state per se, but of what and how modernizing processes more broadly, in the form of new modes of thought and ideologies in the wake of societal transition, are represented in early-modern Persian[1] literature. The reading and analysis of the literary works below aims to highlight how modern rationalism intersects with religious thought, and how rationalism and its by-products, science and technology, are presented and assessed in very different ways in two literary works from the early 1920s and early 1930s.

While many works and theories address socio-political organization and the economy in transitional societies, almost none, to my knowledge, examines the representation of transitional societies in literature or art. There are works on literature and the emerging nation-state, notably Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006: 22–36), but very few deal with literature's representation of societal change. This study also attempts to remedy this scholarly deficit. The literary works analyzed below, one utopian, the other dystopian, belong to a genre that presents and discusses social and political issues in literary form. According to Abrams:

> Utopia [Greek for "no place"] can be distinguished from representations of imaginary places, which, either because they are superior

to the real world or manifest exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects, are used primarily as vehicles for *satire* on human life and society . . . The term Dystopia ("bad place") has . . . come to be applied to works of fiction which represent a very unpleasant imaginary world, in which certain ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected in some future culmination.

<div align="right">(Abrams 1971: 177–8)</div>

In daily speech, utopia means an ideal and non-existent world, but a utopian novel was originally meant to outline a new and better society, while simultaneously criticizing contemporary society for the way it organizes itself. The founding fathers of this genre were Thomas More, whose *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu Deque Nova Insula Utopia* appeared in 1516, and Jonathan Swift, famous for *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Dystopia functions more as a warning about present "ominous tendencies," as in, for instance, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Both forms of the genre lend themselves to representing change in society, as their very purpose is to depict critically the way human beings organize.

Historical change in modernizing Iranian society

To contextualize the literature analyzed, the chapter begins with a summary of historical events and social and ideological developments in Iran from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Like many other Middle Eastern countries, Iran underwent modernization, secularization, and internalization in these years. In the same period, the first attempts to formulate and disseminate an Iranian nationalist ideology saw the light of day. These processes started as an intellectual, ideological, and political revolt against the despotism of the reigning Qâjâr shahs. Ideologues and intellectuals living outside Iran wrote and spoke out against this tyranny and despotism and against foreign, especially British and Russian, hegemony over Iranian affairs, and argued for Iranian independence, the rule of law, and democracy. Politically, this opposition took the form of, inter alia, protests against the British tobacco monopoly in 1882, the assassination of the Qâjâr ruler Nâser od-Din Shâh in 1896, and the constitutional revolution of 1905–06. The latter resulted in Iran's becoming, at least on paper, a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system (see Keddie and Amanat 1991). To the disappointment of the constitutionalists, their political

role model, Great Britain, decided with Russia to divide Iran into two spheres of interest in 1907, in reality taking control of the country. This foreign control intensified during the World War I, when Iran was occupied by British and Russian troops. In the chaos following the war and the Russian Revolution, with Qâjâr rule almost non-existent, a military officer in the Cossack brigade, Rezâ Khân, instigated a coup in 1921. The parliamentary system was reinstated and Rezâ Khân became minister of war and later premier.

The political environment in Iran was, though, fragmented and very violent (as it had been during the first parliamentary period). Consequently, according to some historians, the wish arose among the political elite for a strong man (see Rezakhani 2012: 197ff). Eventually, in 1926, Rezâ Khân had himself crowned as Rezâ Shâh Pahlavi, and in his capacity as new dictator began the rapid modernization, Westernization, and centralization of the Iranian social and political-administrative fabric. This was done against the backdrop of a nationalist ideology that sought to depict Iran as a strong and independent nation and the new shah as the heir to the glorious pre-Islamic Achaemenid and Sasanian empires (Abrahamian 1982; Hambly 1991).

Although it can be argued that history repeated itself when in 1925–26 a new dictatorship was established in Iran, it must be highlighted that in a little less than 50 years Iran had experienced intense change in its political and social organization, political awareness, and position vis-à-vis the external world. Under the Qâjârs, Iran was a decentralized tyranny, with each part of the country governed by semi-independent governors and big landowners through a system of tax farming, selling of offices, and widespread corruption. Small portions of the taxes were remitted to the shah, and soldiers were occasionally furnished for warfare and upholding law and order. Alongside this system, the Twelver-Shiʿi clergy presided over judicial and educational institutions and in many ways represented a parallel governing system.

Among the population there was probably no feeling of belonging to a nation or state. The extended family was the social security net, and the local landlord was king. The only other avenue for complaints was the local religious leader. It should be mentioned that for most Iranians Twelver-Shiʿi Islam was *the* cultural identity to which they subscribed (Lambton 1987, especially chapters 3 and 7). The constitutional revolution and resulting parliamentary system was the first step in the slow decline of the almost feudal social system. Political parties were formed around abstract ideologies and class interests, and a clear idea of an independent Iranian nation emerged. This happened first and

foremost among the educational, professional (for instance, lawyers), and administrative elite, which gradually replaced the aristocracy as the upper class, but massive popular participation in the revolution probably helped these ideas and ideologies spread more widely among the population. Both the British–Russian intervention in Iran in 1907 and the occupation of Iran seven years later made many Iranians painfully aware of the world outside the provinces and the country's borders.[2] The shah and the local authorities had ceased to be the sole rulers of the universe and their positions were endangered.

The final onslaught on the old feudal and religious order began with Rezâ Shâh's accession. Local forces throughout Iran, including nomadic tribes, were subdued by a strengthened army, infrastructure was established, powers passed into the hands of the central government, and taxes were directly levied. Citizens were kept on a tight leash through new ID cards and prohibitions on movement out of their municipalities. Finally, juridical and educational institutions were transferred from the *'olamâ* to the state. In many ways, this represented a total secularization of the state, similar to that undertaken by Atatürk in Turkey (Hambly 1991). The symbolic "celebration" of this process occurred in 1935 when Persia, as the country was known in the West, was officially renamed Iran and traditional clothing for female citizens was prohibited ("the removal of the veil").

Liberal and secular ideologies in Iran

A host of ideologies – or new modes of thought – played a role in Iran's transformation from the end of the nineteenth century to the era of Rezâ Shâh. These new modes have two origins. One was the Western modernist ideologies, the other religious, namely, Twelver-Shiʿi Islam (albeit also influenced by Western ideas and social organization).The epistemological differences between these thought systems are considerable, and this resulted in Iran's intellectual development taking two very different directions. One terminated in secular, rational modernism, the other in "spiritual rationalism," in which secular modes of thought were given a religious conceptual framework. Iranian intellectuals living in the Caucasus, Turkey, and Europe in the late nineteenth century became familiar with Western social organization and ideologies, were impressed with the technological and economic state of Europe, and saw liberal democracy and nationalism as the key to this *taraqqi* (progress). These intellectuals, Mirzâ Âqâ Khân Kermâni (Hairi 2012), Mirzâ Abdol-Rahim Tâlebof (Rahman 2012), Mirzâ Fath-ʿAli Akhundzâde (Brands

2012), Malkom Khân (Algar 2012), and Jamâl od-Din Afghâni (Goldziher and Jomier 2012) (who was more pan-Islamist than nationalist) transmitted ideas about liberal democracy and the rule of law[3] through private letters and Persian newspapers published abroad and smuggled into Iran. Through these means the idea of parliamentarianism and popular rule spread in Iran. More alien and revolutionary ideologies and ideas, such as Darwinism and Marxism, were also introduced to a mostly religious Iranian audience.

The introduction of Western democracy was often accompanied by an urge for educational reform. To many intellectuals, social progress was associated with the introduction of secular education for the people,[4] freed from religious institutions and Persianized. This latter had nationalistic undertones, with the Islamic and Arabic-Iranian heritage being strongly denounced and even the Arab-Persian alphabet coming under attack (Hashabeiky, forthcoming). Iranian nationalism intensified in the wake of the constitutional revolution, Japan's victory over almighty Russia in 1905,[5] the Russian and British involvement (and later occupation) of Iran in and after 1907, and, as already mentioned, Rezâ Shâh's coming to power in the 1920s and his pronounced glorification of pre-Islamic Iran and denunciation of imperialist powers.[6]

Early nineteenth-century Iran had witnessed a sectarian, messianic, and millenarian revolt against mainstream Twelver-Shi'ism (Bayat 1982; Amanat 1999). Initially, revolt seems to have been strictly religious (the expectation that the twelfth Shi'i imam was returning to the world to re-establish a just order), but there were also possible socio-economic reasons. The revolt began in the so-called Sheykhi school, but its main ideas were taken over by the Bâbies, whose first "prophet," the Bâb, declared himself the reincarnation of the twelfth imam. As such, he would have wielded both religious and political power over Twelver-Shi'i Iran. In particular, middle-ranking Shi'i clergy and middle-class lay Iranians joined the movement, which was as a result jointly crushed by the Qâjâr shah and the Twelver-Shi'i establishment. Bâbism "involved, in its later stages, a wholesale break with Islam and an attempt to establish a new religious system" (Maceoin 2011). The Bâbies were main actors in the constitutional revolution. With a religious rhetoric colored by a messianic notion of the end of the world and the coming of a new and better order, the Bâbies instrumentalized a religious vocabulary and put it to the service of a political fight for democracy and justice. This amounted to the secularization of a religious movement, in which religious belief and political ideology are hard to distinguish. No doubt, some of the members of this secularized religious current believed that

the democracy, nationalism, education, and so on the secular intellectuals also propounded should be embedded in some religious framework. As such, this current – unlike that represented by secular intellectuals abroad – may have been better suited to persuading the overwhelmingly religious population of the benefits of a new political and social order.

Common to both new strands of thought was the sense of Iran being at the end of time, *donyâ-ye âkhar-e zamân*. The ruling dynasty and the Twelver-Shiʿi establishment were blamed for the moral and political decay and technological and educational backwardness of the country. Also shared was the fear of foreign *political* influence in internal affairs. One of the major differences between the two currents was the secular intellectuals' wholehearted embrace of Western ideology and culture, some aspects of which the secularized religious movement feared. Their fears crystallized and took root when Rezâ Shâh Pahlavi turned Iran into a Westernized, secular nation-state in the 1920s and 1930s.

Against this backdrop of profound socio-political and ideological change, I now venture a reading of Sanʿatizâde's novel *Majma'-e Divânegân* (An Assembly of Lunatics, 1924) and Hedâyat's short story "S.G.L.L." (1933). These, I believe, reflect the changing state of premodern and early modern Iranian society. I do have one caution, though: at least in the first stage of analysis, I follow the old school of New Criticism, in which texts are read and analyzed as autonomous textual statements in their own right.

Utopia: The bliss of rationality, science, and technology

Iran's novelistic output from *ca.* 1910 to 1940 falls into roughly two categories: the historical and the moralist. These works can be labeled early modern or premodern literature. This period also saw the emergence of modernist literature, mostly short stories from the pens of Mohammad ʿAli Jamâlzâde (1921) and Sâdeq Hedâyat (after 1930).[7] In the same period, a literary and philosophical utopia and dystopia saw the light of day, and it is to these I now turn.

In 1924, Abdol Hoseyn Sanʿatizâde (1875–1973) published *Majma'-e Divânegân*, a utopian novel (see also Pedersen 2007). It begins on New Year's Day, when a group of patients escape from a mental hospital (probably in Tehran) where they live a miserable life. They want to celebrate New Year in freedom, in nature, and an old, seemingly mute man, later called *pir* – the Sufi word for "master" – becomes their leader and begins to speak and give orders when they reach a green forest. The *pir* knows the mystical "science of magnetism" and by this means three

inmates are transported on an imaginary journey 2,000 years into the future. The three men, who are nameless and are identified only by their asylum numbers, are able to communicate with the *pir* from the future (San'atizâde 1924: 2–15).

Utopia, the future land where the men end up, is Mount Jabal in Lebanon. The first to arrive is number 102. He reports that the inhabitants speak very fast – as in Bâbi and Bahâ'i texts (cf. Amanat 2007: 339, 349) – something the three men must get used to before being able to understand. The city there is made of glass and china, so that the authorities can control everything. There is no crime and no death, men and women are equal, and all citizens work and play sports voluntarily. Moreover, they happily pay tax to the state, which takes care of all aspects of communal life. Electricity is delivered through solar, wind, and wave technology, and machines do most of the manual work (San'atizâde 1924: 17–25).

Number 57, for his part, is sent on a mental journey and he arrives during the New Year festivities. He meets a beautiful girl and recites a sensual love poem to her, but is abruptly stopped by a policeman, who says that this is forbidden (Ibid: 30). Later we learn why. During the New Year's party, a kind of national hymn is sung expressing the creed of the utopian society. Throughout the description of the utopian society, the key element is ʿ*aql*, rationality/reason:

> We are humans
> We are the nobility of creation
> Truth and affection are our ways
> Science is our guardian
> Brotherhood is for all of us
> Equality is for all of us.

<div align="center">(San'atizâde 1924: 33)[8]</div>

And:

> Higher than anything else is rationality.

<div align="center">(Ibid: 34)</div>

These lofty ideals are supplemented by a more down-to-earth speech by a keynote speaker who warns (in almost Lutheran-Calvinist vein) that too much pleasure results in laziness and sadness and must be avoided (Ibid: 34). Later, number 57 misbehaves again (Ibid: 37) and is taken to a lunatic asylum. Here, unlike in the contemporary Iranian asylum, he

is treated well and resocialized, as is the custom of the utopian society (Ibid: 46–47).

The third traveler, number 29, witnesses a multiple wedding in the utopian land between two thousand 18-year-old girls and the same number of men, aged 25. Their ages seem to be stipulated. The girls choose their husbands and marry without dowry. The ceremony is conducted privately and is based on free choice and reason, not love (Ibid: 42–43). Sensuality has no place in this utopia. Hence, number 57 is being stopped from reciting love poetry earlier in the novel. At the end of the story, the three escaped lunatics are caught by the asylum guards, beaten up, and returned to the asylum (Ibid: 51–3). The novel's final lines read: "In the society of the Golden Age, they found themselves in the hands of ignorant tormentors, under the whip of tyranny and oppression" (Ibid: 53).

Majma'-e Divânegân is essentially a message about an ideal society, which is the opposite of Iranian society at the time. In spite of the optimistic message about a possible better world, San'atizâde's work ends pessimistically with the victory of an oppressive power that even has the gall to call contemporary times "the Golden Age," another version of Paradise on Earth. Despite its ending, San'atizâde's novel in its entirety sends a clear message of the possibility of a blissful life on earth and a genuine "Golden Age." The bliss of utopia in his novel is the product of rationality, science, and technology, and translates at first sight into an entirely secular and modernist mode of thought. However, the descriptions of the utopian world by some of the time travelers, and the designation "Golden Age" – although used as an ironic and scornful reference to contemporary Iran – clothes the utopian novel's message in strictly religious garb. Thus, religion as mode of thought and conceptual framework transforms modern rationalism, in form and in content, into a supernatural force.

Dystopia: The threat of rationality, science, and technology

About a decade later, in 1933, Sâdeq Hedâyat (1903–48) published the dystopian short story "S.G.L.L.," "Serum Gegen Liebes-Leidenschaft" (lit. serum against libido), in the collection *Sâye-rowshan* ("Chiaroscuro") (see also Pedersen 2002: 72–89). The story does not have much of a plot. It is structured as two conversations between two artists, Iranian Susan and American Ted, interrupted by a period of months. The conversations are important to the story's structure, but equally important is the

setting and the one fatal occurrence. The setting is the future global society represented by Kânâr, nowadays Tehran, 2,000 years ahead:

> Two thousand years later, moral, customs, habits, feelings, and all aspects of human life had changed completely. What different creeds and religions had promised people for the last two thousand years, science had made reality. Thirst, hunger, love, and other needs had been taken care of, and old age, illness, and ugliness were now controlled by man. Family life had been abandoned, and all people lived in big buildings with several storeys, like in a beehive. But one, single pain was still there, an incurable pain, and that was the spleen of life, the tiredness and disgust at a futile and meaningless existence.
>
> (Hedâyat 1933: 5)

In addition, the physical framework of the civilization is frightening and dehumanized: "The whole city with its magnificent skyscrapers looked like a war castle or a nest built by insects" (Ibid: 7). The city is fully electrified. There are electric cars, lifts, and moving pavements everywhere. TV sets transmit the news from all over the world. Robots function as policemen in the streets (Ibid). Against this futuristic society, nature stands untamed as an apocalyptical warning: "Only the shape of Mount Damâvand was rising south of the city, silent, tall, grand, and threatening; and from its conical top orange-colored smoke was rising" (Ibid: 7–8).

In this society where science is victorious, humanity is the loser. Still, science cannot eradicate modern man's quest for a meaningful life. To solve this problem, a ruling and controlling body of scientists suggest that mankind should commit collective suicide. For those who will not accept suicide, the scientists have invented a serum, *Serum gegen Liebes-Leidenschaft* (libido), which can eradicate the quest for a meaningful life. *Liebes-Leidenschaft* is seen as the drive behind man's search for such a life. By removing this drive, two goals will be achieved. One, people will be content, as there will be no futile quest for a meaningfulness; and, two, people will stop reproducing and the human race will die out. Thus, science will be victorious, and nature will be robbed of its ultimate triumph, death, as man will kill the human race himself (Hedâyat 1933: 22–6). However, due to a laboratory mistake, the serum sets the basic human instincts free instead of removing them. Anarchy, chaos, and collective madness break out, and sensuality and desire become dominant over the world, so that the entire civilization falls apart. At the end of the story, groups of "naturists" or "nudists"

(also called the naked), who live on the fringes of society in opposition to the "ideology of science," conquer the now weakened, technological civilization (Ibid: 29–30, 34–5).

As mentioned, the plot unfolds in two conversations between a man and a woman just before and shortly after the administration of S.G.L.L. Ted, the artist, is a representative of the West, Susan, an Iranian sculptor, of the East. They know each other well, and Ted has come to tell Susan that he loves her, body and soul, before it is too late, that is, before the collective suicide and administration of S.G.L.L., which, in Ted's opinion, is deplorably inhuman, breaking all emotional ties between people. Susan, for her part, thinks that suicide and S.G.L.L. are a logical consequence of the fight of science against nature, but also a way to restore the earth to a former harmonious order without the sovereignty of man and science (Ibid: 28–9). In the story, Ted is described as living in accordance with natural instincts. This is not to say that nature should rule blindly, but rather that body and instincts are the basis of life, and that soul or spirit should conform to the bodily instincts. He also believes that instincts lie behind all intellectual and technological achievements, as well as solidarity and empathy among people (Ibid: 19, 27, 29, 31). Susan is the opposite. She is not afraid of and does not deny natural instincts, but she does not believe in a division between body and soul. She insists that the individual is the sum of her/his characteristics, lives only a short while, must do the utmost to be true to himself or herself, and must strive to leave behind an individual, aesthetic impression on life. That is why she is an artist and dislikes the technological society she lives in. Technology has made the city resemble an insect nest. She is an individualist (Ibid: 6, 8–9, 14–16, 19).[9]

Following the administration of S.G.L.L. and in the ensuing chaos, Ted and Susan meet again in Susan's apartment in Kânâr. They have moved from their former philosophical positions and decide to unite by committing suicide together. Ted gives in to Susan's aestheticism and Susan gives in to Ted's belief in the body as the basis of everything. They take a laughing gas overdose, and in a reproduction of a dream Ted once had and a sculpture, The Ephemeral Insect, Susan had made earlier, they die. When the "naturists" invade Susan's apartment, they find a coffin on which is written "Lovers' sleep": "in the coffin a naked woman and a naked man were, like a sculpture of insects, lying in each other's arms... Their lips were pressed together, and a white snake was twisting around their waists" (Hedâyat 1933: 35).

The union of Ted and Susan is a kind of utopia in the wider context of the story – a bodily union with pre-Fall connotations symbolized by

the white snake. But the overall content of Hedâyat's story is dystopia expressed in three more and less explicit ways. The first lies in the fact that the utopian union of Ted and Susan is only possible in death. The other two are communicated, first through the dehumanized technology that has created the future society represented by Kânâr *and* the original plan for S.G.L.L.: eradication of life's meaning and of mankind, since science has been unable to make man happy; and second through the failed S.G.L.L. experiment that opens the way for an untamed nature and sexual drive that *also* destroys humanity and mankind. Arguably, Susan's philosophical position taken to the extreme would result in the first eventuality; and Ted's in the second. Thus, Susan and Ted function as symbols of two aspects of future society that – kept apart and taken to extremes – make up the picture of dystopia. The story's overall message, though, seems to be that the greatest danger to (modern) society is blind faith in science and technology.

Utopia and dystopia compared

Both San'atizâde's *Majma'-e Divânegân* and Hedâyat's "S.G.L.L." deal with new ideas and ideologies introduced into Iranian society at the beginning of the twentieth century. One facet of the ideological and philosophical content of *Majma'-e Divânegân* is that technology – and rationality – sets man free and creates a harmonious society. The other seems to echo the French revolutionaries and Marxism: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.[10] In *Majma'-e Divânegân,* technology is an instrument working on its own, its origin in man left unexplained. That apart, and significant for the religious aspects of the novel, is the old sage, the *pir*, a religious term, who is able to make contact with the future technological world, and *that* through special, pseudo-scientific, and mystical powers ("science of magnetism"). It could be argued that technology in *Majma'-e Divânegân* is heaven-sent.[11] Also conspicuous is the fact that only "equality" and "fraternity" are present in the text. "Liberty" is missing, and the novel's utopian society is characterized by control, rules, and prohibitions (houses built of glass, restrictions on enjoyment, banned love poetry). Thus, the oppression that characterizes contemporary society in *Majma'-e Divânegân* spills over into the utopian society, but in another and *rational* form.

By contrast, we see the ideological and philosophical content of "S.G.L.L." in the fact that blind faith in science and technology will result in dystopia. In addition, there is a fear, represented by Susan, that technological society along with science will create a community where

all look alike and individuality disappears. There is also a clear animosity in the short story against all totalitarian modes of thought, ideologies, and movements. On the other hand, the opposite societal extreme is created in "S.G.L.L.," unchecked nature and instinct, as destructive as the blind worship of science and technology. Another striking difference between the two works is that "S.G.L.L." is a globalized work of fiction of sorts. French, German, and English words appear in the tale, while *Majma'-e Divânegân* never leaves the Iranian world, even though utopia lies on Mount Jabal in (Twelver-Shiʿi) Lebanon.[12]

At yet another meta-level, the greatest difference between the two is the portrait of man. In *Majma'-e Divânegân,* individual man does not exist. The protagonists are "flat characters" or types: the *pir*, whose background and inner life we never get to know, and the three travelers, who are only identified by number. (This, of course, is not unusual in premodern utopian literature). Also, in the utopian society there is no indication of individuality, as witness the mass wedding described above. In "S.G.L.L.," by contrast, we meet "rounded characters" in the shape of Susan and Ted, of whom we are given a sketchy but still palpable psychological portrait. Additionally, their worldviews and philosophy of life undergo development as a kind of individuation. In "S.G.L.L.," Man is a product of biological heritage[13] and societal influence. And from Man emanates the whole world, as well the physical environment and technology, as abstract ideologies and philosophies.

Utopia, dystopia in an era of pessimism

There is only about a decade between the two literary works analyzed, but they differ remarkably in their depiction of modernity. There may, though, be a common trait. *Majma'-e Divânegân* seems to position itself within a socio-religious mode of thought. It does not resemble modernist literature, and its universe reflects premodern, religious modes of thought: man is *not* portrayed as freely mastering his fate; individuality does not exist in the text. In the utopian world, rationality standardizes society and behavior and inner feelings are and can be controlled. Rationality (along with science and technology) can be said to have defeated both inner and outer nature. It could be argued that rationality as a principle in itself, detached from its origin in man, is presented as a universal governing principle (not unlike God himself) and as the Creator of Paradise on Earth, the utopia. Rationality becomes religion and is a healing instrument in human society in the future utopian world. "S.G.L.L.," on the other hand, is a fully fledged modernist work that has much in

common with the works of European writers such as Kafka, Sartre, and Camus,[14] especially as regards such common themes as alienation in modern, dehumanized technological society, loss of individual identity, totalitarianism, and so on. What makes Hedâyat's short story truly modern is that it criticizes modernity from modernity's own starting point: individual man is the center of the universe, creator of reality (physical as well as spiritual), and there is no trace of a metaphysical world order.

Common to both works is the hopelessness expressed on behalf of Man and a possible good life on earth. Now, the utopian and dystopian literary genres invite, almost demand, a pessimistic view of the world. On the other hand, the same helplessness and feeling of being at a loss can be found in most of the historical as well as moralist novels of the period. This leads me to two proposals about early modern Iranian novels. First, the utopian and dystopian literary genres were born out of a general mood in Iran at that time. Second, the pessimistic mood had a variety of motives but still resulted in a common feeling of hopelessness and being at a loss.

The despair one can read in San'atizâde's *Majma'-e Divânegân* is born of the victory of brute force and oppression by contemporary earthly powers (fictional or not) and the defeat of ʿ*aql*, reason. There is a kind of resignation about the possibility of creating the good and just society under existing conditions, but perhaps also the hope of, and certainly longing for, the miraculous appearance of the ʿ*aql* that could rescue Iran. The pessimism in Hedâyat's "S.G.L.L." stems from another source. The short story is witness to a process whereby the modern world (first and foremost dehumanized science and technology) has been embraced, analyzed, and rejected. Modern science and technologies were supposed to secure happiness on earth, but proved inadequate to the task. In this there is, of course, a skepticism toward science in general, but there is also a nostalgia for things lost. In "S.G.L.L.," Ted's longing for a time when solidarity and empathy existed among humans, and Susan's longing for individuality and the inherited soul of her forefathers, function as positive signifiers and indicate that something in the "old culture" has been lost in the quest for eternal bliss in the brave new, modern world.[15] We thus have a premodern text, *Majma'-e Divânegân*, which despairs about contemporary social and political conditions and hopes for the coming of rational, scientific society, which has almost religious connotations – the city in the sky. And we have a truly modernist piece, "S.G.L.L.," with its glimpses of an anxiety about what the modern, technological world will bring and destroy, or maybe what the modern world already has brought and destroyed.

Conclusion

Many early twentieth-century Iranian novels share thoughts and ideas expressed in both *Majma'-e Divânegân* and "S.G.L.L.": the longing for a new and better modern world, the nature of which is not yet fully understood; and a fear of that modern world and the implication of its displacing the old, loathed but safe and familiar world. *Majma'-e Divânegân* transforms modern, scientific rationality and religion into two almost identical modes of thought by separating rationality from its origin in the human faculties and making it into a *deus ex machine*. "S.G.L.L.," by contrast, criticizes blind faith in rationality, science, and technology from a modernist point of view, depicting rationality and its by-products as a very threat to humanity. Common to the utopian novel and dystopian short story is the sense of being at a loss. This feeling has different causes in each work, but both seem to express the sense of being caught at the crossroads between the old and the new.

Notes

1. Persian refers to the language and the literary products of the country, while Iran refers to the political and geographical entity.
2. Britain tried to make Iran a protectorate in 1920, but was thwarted by, among others, the United States (Abrahamian 1982: 114).
3. Significantly, Malkom Khân's London-based newspaper bore the name *Qânun*, Law.
4. One example is the preface to the first modernistic volume of Persian short stories (see Haideh Daragahi's translation in *Literary Review* 18(1), Fall 1974: 18–37, "The Shaping of the Modern Short Story: Jamâlzâda's Preface to *Yiki bud, Yiki Nabud*."
5. This was the first time in many centuries that a European imperial power had been defeated by an Asian underdog.
6. Persian "nationalism" has its roots further back in time (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001: 77ff).
7. See Kamshad (1996), Chapters VI, VIII, IX, XI, and Part Two; Yahiya Aryanpur 1995 (1374) *Az Nimâ tâ Ruzgâr-e mâ*, 3rd volume (*Az Sabâ tâ Nimâ*), Tehran.
8. All quotes in the chapter are my translations.
9. It could be argued that at times Susan is depicted as believing in an "independent" soul. But what she believes in is a generic or archetypical soul, as can be seen from this quote: "Her ancestors' souls, her inherited soul revolted against this artificiality [of the town of the future Kânâr]" (Hedâyat 1933: 8).
10. This slogan might also have Masonic origins. Freemasons were active during the constitutional revolution in Iran (Algar 2000).
11. Furthermore, utopia in *Majma'-e Divânegân* is situated on a high mountain, Mount Jabal, almost in heaven.

12. Hedâyat spent six years in Belgium and France in the early 1920s, while San'atizâde did not leave Iran before writing his novel.
13. There is also a hint of the transcendental (or maybe Jungian or even Khayyâmian) genesis of Man/the human soul.
14. Later, Hedâyat wrote about Kafka, *Kafka's Message* (1948) and translated his *In the Penal Colony* (1948) and "Before the Law" (from *The Trial*) (1944). He also translated Sartre's "The Wall" (1950).
15. This aspect can be found elsewhere in Hedâyat's works. See my analysis of Hedâyat's short story "Tarikkhâne" (Dark Room) in Pedersen (2002: 89–101). In the story, there is a defense of tranquil, traditional life in a small village and criticism of the bustle of modern life.

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12

Indian Shiʿa Muslims and the Idea of Home in Rahi Masoom Reza's Work

Torkel Brekke

In this chapter, I explore ideas about Muslim nationalism in two novels by Rahi Masoom Reza (1925–92). The novels are *Adha Gaon* [Ādhā gām̐v] (A village divided, 2012 [1966])[1] and *Os Ki Boond* [Os kī būm̐d] (Dewdrop, 2010 [1970]). Reza was an Indian novelist and playwright of Shiʿi origin from eastern Uttar Pradesh and is now most famous for his many successful Bollywood scripts. Of the two novels, *Adha Gaon* is the more important and must be considered a significant text in modern vernacular Indian literature. This highly autobiographical novel is about the village of Gangauli in Ghazipur, eastern Uttar Pradesh, just prior to the Partition in 1947. Gangauli is divided into a northern and a southern section. The two sections often experience trouble and conflict and much of the story is devoted to detailed descriptions of the large and small intrigues of village life in the 1940s. It is about power, money, and honor; about marriages, planned and cancelled; about pregnancies, planned and unplanned; and about illness and death. But first of all the story takes us into the serious preparations for the celebration of Muharram, the festival commemorating the Shiʿa martyrs at Karbala. People prepare their local *imambara*s (congregation halls) and build *tazia*s, replicas of the tomb of Imam Husain. They recite *marsia*s, poems narrating the events at Karbala, where Imam Husein and his followers were martyred on the tenth day of the month of Muharram in 680 CE.

Os Ki Boond is a much shorter novel, but it addresses many of the same problems and challenges faced by Muslims during the 1940s. Both novels show that the creation of a Muslim national feeling in modern South Asia was no easy task. The linguistic and religious dividing lines within

the imagined Muslim community were sharp, and the attempt to create Muslim nationalism is depicted as essentially an elite intellectual enterprise that had no resonance among villagers. The local Shiʿa Muslims of Ghazipur simply could not understand how intellectual Sunni Muslims could talk about a homeland far away. Moreover, as we shall see, the construction of an all-encompassing nationalism took place in a period of tension and violence between Sunnis and Shiʿa in Uttar Pradesh. The novels show that the religious and linguistic divisions *within* the Muslim population were at least as important as the divisions between Muslims and other groups.

From composite culture to exclusive identities

Adha Gaon explores the significance of religious identities for Shiʿa, Hindus, and untouchables in everyday village life, but the reader realizes that times are changing fast. The villagers hear constant rumors of the big politics of the Muslim League and the Congress Party and their simple ideas about religion and nationhood are about to change for good. This is the time when the dream of Pakistan was taking hold in some Indian Muslim intellectual circles. The great poet Muhammad Iqbal (1875–1938) wrote in support of a Muslim homeland in South Asia, and Muhammed Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) proclaimed Muslims to be a separate nation in his famous speech to the All India Muslim League at Lahore in 1940. Jinnah made it clear that Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religions, two different nations, and that it would be disastrous to yoke together two such nations in a single state. However, scholars have debated Jinnah's real intentions and the lack of precision and realism in his ideas about a new state (Jalal 1984; Hayat 2008).

Only a few decades earlier, British observers had noted that from Bengal to Punjab "Muslim" and "Hindu" were in many respects fuzzy categories and that in many situations the religious groups could hardly be distinguished from one another. In the worldview of the rural Indian population described in *Adha Gaon*, the idea of nationhood had not taken root. Pakistan is certainly among the most fascinating examples in the history of nationalisms: Faisal Devji has observed that Pakistan was founded on Zionist ideas, with Israel as the closest parallel (Devji 2013).

In the novel *Os Ki Boond*, Reza explores the theme of what some scholars have called "composite cultures" – that is, cultures where the boundaries between religious groups are blurred and people from different religions naturally take part in one another's everyday lives,

including, specifically, ritual and religious aspects of life. It seems clear that Reza is eager to show that the borders between Hindus and Muslims were not clear in the culture that he used to know as a child in Ghazipur. He weaves this topic into the problems encountered in the creation of Pakistan and one often gets the impression that his fiction wants to convey the message that the borders between Muslims and Hindus were really created along with the political borders between the new countries of Pakistan and India.

For instance, at one point, we get a glimpse into the mind of Vazir Hasan's wife as she is speaking to Allah (Reza 2010: 36–7). Her conversation with God is rather blunt, because she is angry with Him for creating Pakistan. It must be quite obvious to Him that this act was a stupid one, and for her personally the sad consequence was that her son had moved to the new country, even though he had never personally been in favor of a separate state for Muslims. While she engaged in her dialogue with God, a group of Muslim *mirāsan* (religious singers) stop nearby and start beating their drum and singing. The song is about the man with the black shawl (which in their dialect is rendered *kārī kāmar*).

The author breaks into the narrative by saying that the singers had no idea that the man they are singing about was not Muhammad, but in fact Kṛṣṇa (Krishna), and he was not from Arabia, but from Hindustan. Then the author goes further to dissolve the distinction between the two religious leaders by saying "the fact is that this is not about Muhammad or Kṛṣṇa, but the real point is that it is the man with the black shawl."[2] These kinds of authorial intrusion seem to indicate that Reza had a very explicit message about the composite religious culture of Ghazipur, about the changes to this culture around the time of Partition, and about the crystallization of exclusive religious identities.

Language and Muslim nationalism

Language is extremely significant in the novels of Rahi Masoom Reza. He is one of very few Indian Muslim novelists who decided to write in Hindi, rather than Urdu, a choice that in itself is a statement of a desire to relativize and challenge simple religious and national identities. With the growing identification of Urdu with the Muslim community, a reaction against the spread of the language set in among Hindus of north India. They advocated the Hindi variant written in Devanagari script, as opposed to Urdu written in Persian script. Many Indian scripts are, like languages, important symbols of regional and religious identity and the unity of the groups using them. Increasingly, Hindus and Muslims came

to identify themselves with a speech community. Growing sanskritiza-
tion of Hindi and arabicization and persianization of Urdu deepened
the religio-linguistic schism. In *Adha Gaon*, however, we see a different
aspect of linguistic nationalism: the deep suspicion of Shiʿa Muslim vil-
lagers toward the educated Urdu of the Sunni elites who were espousing
nationalist ideas of Pakistan. In many places in the novel, characters
comment on the language used by other characters, and particularly the
use of pure Urdu raises the suspicions of the villagers.

The novel is written in Hindi, but the dialogue is written in dif-
ferent dialects in order to reveal and highlight the great cultural and
linguistic differences between the persons and groups in the story. These
differences reveal regional variation, but more importantly differences
of caste and social status, and reveal ambitions in terms of education
and intellectual sophistication. The people of the region speak a lan-
guage called "Bhojpuri," and there are differences between the local
Sayids – the high-caste Shiʿa Muslims – and the lowest castes of the
village, especially the *chamars*.

The linguistic and cultural divide becomes acute when young men
from Aligarh University visit the village of Gangauli in order to secure
votes for the Muslim League and the Pakistan project. Their language
clashes with the language of the local people, and this rapidly becomes
a symbol of the seemingly unbridgeable divide between the world-
views of educated nationalists and the locals. The characters in the
novel are very aware of the symbolic weight of language, and their
thoughts are often revealed when they self-consciously choose to speak
pure Urdu in order to distance themselves from the uncultured villagers
and their Bhojpuri dialect. In the English translation, Gillian Wright
has added to the text in order to make it clear that the young men
from Aligarh speak a different language from the village-dwellers. The
English translation typically adds sentences like "in the correct Urdu
of an educated city-dweller," where the original Hindi novel has no
such text.[3]

Language is just as important in *Os Ki Boond*. At one point, Vazīr
Hasan, the main character in the novel, discusses poetry with his
daughter-in-law Shehla, who is visiting from Pakistan. The background
of the discussion is his overhearing her recite the emotional poetry of
Mirabhai in Hindi, and he asks himself why she, a Muslim, should recite
this type of poem. A little earlier, he has had a conversation with a
Hindi teacher at his school, who has annoyed him immensely by recit-
ing poems in Farsi, a Muslim language in Hasan's worldview. Shehla tells
him that Urdu poetry (*gazal*) is written in very easy language, using the

Hindi words for "easy" (*saral*) "language" (*bhāṣā*) (Reza 2010: 30). The father-in-law reacts with surprise, asking what she is talking about with those words. Shehla is quick to explain that when she said *bhāṣā* she really meant *zabān*, the Urdu word for language. Reza uses this type of linguistic mixing to show how significant and awkard language has become for Muslims, both in India and in Pakistan, because of the Partition. He reveals the characters' thoughts about the words they use through a self-consciousness that often makes it difficult for them to use language in a natural way.

The sense of *ghar* (home)

The most interesting aspect of both novels is the encounter, and the clash, between the nationalist ideals of Islam espoused by a new Muslim elite and the religious and cultural identities of the local Shiʿa Muslims of Gangauli. In the first chapter of *Adha Gaon*, where many of the leading characters are introduced and key themes suggested, we hear a discussion about the future of Indian Muslims. The conversation takes place between several of the villagers, and one of them remarks that separation from their homeland seems to be the fate of Muslims. Did the Prophet himself not have to leave Mecca for Medina? Then the conversation continues between Hakim Ali Kabir, an important Shiʿi of Uttar Patti (the northern half of the village), and Anwarul Hasan Raqi. The Raqis are traders and are Sunni, not Shiʿa.

Anwarul Hasan Raqi says that the Congress Party is the party of the Hindus (Reza 2003: 40–1, 2012: 51). He also reminds listeners that most *zamindars* (landowners) are Muslims, and for this reason the Congress Party will certainly bring the institution of *zamindari* (feudal landownership) to an end. If this happens, where can Muslims go? Where are the *ghar* (homes) of Muslims in the countryside? Muslims are just like salt in *dal* (lentils), he points out, meaning that they are too few to make their voices heard in a majority Hindu population. Hakim Ali Kabir does not like Anwarul Hasan Raqi's reasoning and points out that salt is in fact necessary for *dal* to taste of anything at all. Anwarul Hasan Raqi replies that it is the *taqdīr* (fate) of Muslims to suffer, but Hakim Ali Kabir does not buy the argument. First, he says, I do not think that the British are about to leave us and, second, *ronā* (to weep or lament) is the fate of us Shiʿa. Hakim Ali Kabir closes the conversation by saying that you people – meaning you Sunni Muslims – can keep your *qavvālī* songs (Sufi devotional songs) to yourself! (Reza 2003: 41, 2012: 52). This is a rude remark and the onlookers do not know what to

say. Episodes, such as this, show that the social milieu of Gangauli as described by Reza also contains real and potential tension between Shiʿa and Sunnis.

The main theme of the novel is the idea of home, and particularly the striking contradictions between the imagined homeland of Pakistan and the real home of the village, where, as some of the main characters often say, the tombs of the forefathers, the fields, and houses are found. On many occasions, we understand that some of the Muslims in the area are concerned about the idea of a possible new Muslim homeland – Pakistan – and its relationship to their homes in India. Toward the end of *Adha Gaon*, the author breaks in with a short chapter called *Bhūmikā* (introduction) in which he reveals some of his own thoughts. He starts by saying that he is *bahut pareśān* (deeply worried) (Reza 2012: 289). He is constantly asking himself where he really belongs: in Azamgarh, the locality of his father's family, or in Ghazipur. Where is his real *ghar*? Reza dwells on this word *ghar*, pronouncing it the most beautiful word in every language and dialect. It is because Gangauli is not just a village, but his home, that he repeats he belongs here and is not going to move, in spite of the insistence by Hindu nationalists of the Jan Sangh that Muslims do not belong. And this *kyōnki* (because) is too strong for any sword to cut, he writes.

At one point in the bazaar, Phunnan Miyan, a central character in the story, meets two acquaintances, Samiuddin Khan and Farooq, son of the Sunni Raqi Anwarul Hasan. Farooq greets Phunnan and the latter's first reaction is to ask Farooq how his Pakistan is doing. Pakistan is being made, Farooq assures Phunnan. Then Phunnan wants to know whether Gangauli will be part of Pakistan, thereby revealing that he has no clue about the plans for the new Muslim country nor about the geographical position of his own village in the east of what is today Uttar Pradesh. Farooq patiently explains that Pakistan will be made up of Punjab, Sindh, and Bengal, but he adds that they are working to include Aligarh Muslim University in Pakistan too. There is no point to Pakistan if Gangauli is not included in it, Phunnan states in a confrontational tone. Farooq retorts: "There will be an Islamic government (*islāmī hukūmat*)" (Reza 2003: 141, 2012: 155). But there is no Islam wherever Islamic government is built, Phunnan insists. He reminds Farooq that this village of Gangauli is where the graves of their forefathers are, where their *tazia* platforms are, and where their fields and homes are, so he is certainly not so stupid as to be fooled by the patriotic slogan "Pakistan Zindabad!"

> "When the British leave, the Hindus will rule
>   (*rāj hogā*)," Farooq replies.
> "Yes, yes, you say so," Phunnan says.
>
> (Ibid)

He finds the idea ridiculous that all Hindus are murderers just waiting for an occasion to kill Muslims. Phunnan mentions the names of Parusaram and Jhinguriya, Hindus in the local community who are good people. He reminds Farooq that once, when the *sunnī log* (Sunni Muslims) tried to prevent the Shiʿa of Gangauli from carrying the bier of Hazsrat Ali in procession, the Hindu Parusaram supported the Shiʿa and resolved the problem. It was not Jinnah Sahib (i.e. Muhammad Ali Jinnah) who helped them.

Farooq then tries to explain that the sincerity – using the English word "sincerity" – of Hindus toward Shiʿa is just a *maśakūk* (deception). Phunnan reacts strongly to this use of English. "*What* is a deception?" he demands. Farooq wavers and starts to explain what he meant, but is cut short by Phunnan. "You have forgotten the language of your forefathers (*bāb-dādā zabān*)!" Phunnan exclaims, thereby exposing his distrust of the people who leave the village and come back with big ideas and foreign words to explain them. "Stupid Pakistan (*susar Pakistan*)," Phunnan says, before turning to another person, and Farooq walks off (Reza 2003: 141, 2012: 155).

Aligarh Muslim University and Muslim nationalism

Nowhere is the clash between the nationalist ideals of Pakistan and the down-to-earth realism of the village more apparent than in the meeting between students from Aligarh and the inhabitants of Gangauli. At several points in the novel, we encounter students and intellectuals from Aligarh Muslim University. These encounters are important because they bring out the huge clash between the worldviews of ordinary village Muslims and the emergent nationalism of an educated Muslim class that looked to all Muslim groups for support, regardless of sectarian divides. Rahi Masoom Reza's descriptions of the ideas of Aligarh are of particular importance, because he was educated at that famous Muslim institution himself.

Aligarh Anglo-Muslim College was founded in 1875 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Khan was perhaps the most prominent representative of modernist South Asian Islam in the late nineteenth century. He was

typical of progressive Muslim leaders of the time because he believed that Muslims needed to work hard to integrate their own cultures with the modern values and practices brought by the British. Khan was first of all concerned with education. He thought that educational reform was the key to uplifting the Muslim population socially in British India. To promote education among Muslims, he founded Aligarh College, which would become one of the most important Islamic centers of learning in South Asia.

Khan was also highly modernist in the sense that he wanted to rid Islam of irrational practices and superstitions, reform ritual practice, and codify correct belief. Moreover, in the social sphere he argued for the emancipation of women, abandonment of polygamy, and general adoption of Western manners. We should also note that Khan was an Indian Muslim nationalist and not a pan-Islamist, and discouraged Muslim loyalty to the Ottoman Caliph. During the last years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, many Indian Muslims supported the Khilafat movement and prominent leaders such as Al-Afghani argued that the Caliph was leader of the whole Muslim *umma*. Khan completely rejected this theory and urged Indian Muslims to concentrate on their own national challenges (Malik1968: esp. 229–30)

These ideas can be discerned in the talk of the Aligarh students we meet at several points in *Adha Gaon*. Late in the novel, when a group of Aligarh students reach Gangauli in order to canvass Shiʿi support for the Muslim League, the clash between the village worldview and the nationalist ideals common at Aligarh are described in detail. The students are referred to as the boys wearing black *sherwanis* (a modern Muslim coat), thereby signaling their superior status. At one point toward the end of the novel, two young men canvassing for the Muslim League knock on the door of a young woman named Kammo. At first, Kammo is flattered by the two strangers' respectful language, but very soon communication between the nationalists and the local woman breaks down. The young men from Aligarh use language that is either incomprehensible or simply annoying to Kammo. They describe Aligarh University as an *islāmī tahzīb kā ek rauśan minārā* (beacon of Islamic culture), to which poor Kammo replies that she always thought Aligarh had something to do with education. In other words, when the educated men use metaphors, they are taken literally and misunderstood by locals such as Kammo.

They then explain that without Pakistan, without a country for the Muslims, 80 million Muslims will become *achhūt* (untouchables). The simple Kammo reacts with incredulity. How can anybody say that the Muslim Sayids of Ghazipur district will become *achhūt*? Everyody knows

that *achhūts* are the *chamars* (a large untouchable community in northern India). Sayyids, who are not born *achhūt*, can never become *achhūt*. Again she takes a metaphor literally, derailing the discussion in the process. The Aligarh boys are simply not able to bring their language down to the level of their listeners and they have no success in explaining why there is a need to create Pakistan for Indian Muslims.

The pan-Islamism of the Muslim League is represented in Reza's novel by these young men from Aligarh, the center for the creation of a modernist Muslim identity. The Aligarh project never appealed in a general way to the Shiʿi population of Uttar Pradesh. Aligarh has often been presented as an ecumenical Muslim institution incorporating both Sunnis and Shiʿa in a modernist project involving inter-sectarian cooperation and upliftment, and several important supporters of Aligarh were indeed Shiʿa. However, from its foundation in 1875, Aligarh produced a new generation and a new class of professionals and intellectuals. This group was predominantly Sunni and Shiʿas were soon alienated.

Shiʿi opposition to Aligarh came from several quarters, as shown by Justin Jones in his recent study of Shiʿi Islam in colonial India. Several of the top Shiʿi ʿ*ulamaʾ* were against Aligarh and its Western-style learning. They saw it as irreligious, *neicheri* (materialist), and directly opposed to key Shiʿi religious ideas (Jones 2011: 154). Several Shiʿi educational *anjumans* (organizations, societies) were created in direct opposition to Aligarh on the grounds that what was needed was not the modernism of Aligarh, but a strengthening of traditional religious education. In fact, many landowning Shiʿa Sayyids of the towns of Uttar Pradesh saw the Sunni activists from Aligarh as a threat to their traditional authority and power. For their part, Western-educated activists of the Aligarh movement often saw Shiʿa Sayyids as uneducated people clinging to traditional economic privilege and cultural status (Jones 2011: 158).

This distrust is obvious in Rahi Masoom Reza's depiction of the meeting between the village and the Aligarh students. If we place this meeting of two worldviews in larger historical and political context, we first need to note there has been much scholarly debate about the growth and nature of Muslim national feeling in the crucial years after the provincial elections of the winter of 1936–37. The Government of India Act in 1936 called for such elections and the Indian National Congress emerged as the great winner in most provinces, including the United Provinces, when the results were made public in the spring of 1937. Congress's assumption of political power in many parts of India

was a big step toward self-rule, and the party worked hard to win over Indian Muslims and forge a coalition with the Muslim League. This attempt at political cooperation was unsuccessful and responsibility for the failure has often been laid at the door of Muhammed Ali Jinnah, because of his demands for Muslim political representation (Pandey 1978). After the provincial elections in the United Provinces, the Muslim League grew strong under Jinnah's leadership. This was the time when and place where Muslim nationalism in India was forged and this is the period that Reza writes about in relation to his village in Ghazipur district. In 1940, the Pakistan resolution was passed by the Muslim League in Lahore and the alienation between Congress and League deepened to the point of irreversibility.

Shiʿa suspicion of Muslim nationalism

More importantly, recent research shows that the period from 1936 to 1938 was marked by extreme religious tension and even violence between Sunni and Shiʿa Muslims in the United Provinces (Dhulipala 2010: esp. 621ff.). The epicenter of the sectarian violence was the capital Lucknow, the main center of Shiʿi culture in India, but the tensions also spread to places like Ghazipur. This is the immediate context for *Adha Gaon*. There had been tensions between Sunnis and Shiʿa over annual *tazia* processions since 1905. In that year, disputes broke out over the nature of the celebration of Muharram. Shiʿa complained to the district magistrate that Sunnis had given the celebrations the wrong flavor, in part by chanting Charyari, verses in praise of the first four Caliphs. In retaliation, the Shiʿa increased their singing of Tabarra, those verses abusing the first three Caliphs. To the Shiʿa, these were usurpers and enemies of Ali, the rightful Caliph. Over the ensuing years and decades, more conflicts broke out and the British decided to prohibit the chanting of Sunni Charyari verses near the Shiʿi processions on the most important days of the Shiʿi calendar, and banned the use of abusive Tabarra recitations at all times, as these were seen as religious defamation of Sunni Islam. However, neither side was happy with the arrangements, and in 1936 in Lucknow the tensions between Sunnis and Shiʿa boiled over into violent clashes, with the British colonial administration caught in between. The riots and violence flared up repeatedly in 1936, 1937, and 1938, with both sides organizing themselves for self-defense (Dhulipala 2010: 623–4).

    We encounter the conflict between Sunnis and Shiʿa in the United Provinces in little episodes and comments throughout Reza's novel.

Although Muhammed Ali Jinnah and several other important leaders of the Muslim League were Shiʿi, the main Shiʿi organization, Anjuman Tanzimul Mumineen, denounced the Muslim League as a Sunni chauvinist organization and asked Indian Shiʿas to rather join the Congress.

In *Adha Gaon*, the Shiʿa of Gangauli are generally very skeptical about Pakistan. Early in the novel, we see the great debates about Muslim nationalism divide the village and sometimes make interpersonal relations tense and difficult. Reza's characters also present us with specifically religious arguments against Jinnah's nationalist aspirations. In an early chapter, we met Abbas, a young man who returns to Gangauli from his studies at Aligarh only during vacations. Now he returns to his village to celebrate Muharram with his family, but another reason for returning is the love between him and a simple village girl, Sitara. Abbas tells Sitara and others about the great political processes taking place in India and mentions the names of important Muslim League politicians of the day. Abbas is a sworn supporter of Pakistan and the national idea and tells his listeners in the village how 100 million Indian Muslims would give their blood for the great leader Jinnah. The ideas he has imbibed at Aligarh have made him a nationalist and his thoughts clash head-on with those of the village people, including his beloved Sitara. When Pakistan is created, all will be luxury for the Muslims (*aiś kareṃge . . . aiś!*), Abbas says (Reza 2003: 47, 2012: 58). Sitara accepts his views, unlike the other villagers, simply because she is in love with him: "Sitara took no interest (*dilcaspī*) in whether Pakistan was created or not, she would just listen to Abbas' voice. It engulfed her like the sweet smell of frying eggs. However, she did learn the name of Pakistan and she also became convinced that it must be a good thing" (Reza 2003: 47, 2012: 58).

However, Sitara also notes with astonishment that nobody else has anything good (*acchā*) to say about Pakistan. She would stand in a doorway and listen to conversations that went like this:

Since Imam Husain told Amir-bin-Saad that he would not swear allegiance (*baiat karnā*) to Yazid, and that if Yazid thought he would rebel he should allow him to go to India (*hindustān*), therefore no one who is a follower of Imam Husain can wish India ill (*burā*). After all the Imam Sahib must have had some reason for choosing this land of infidels (*kāphīroṃ*).

And it's not only that – a Kashmiri Brahmin was also made a martyr (*śahīd*) at Karbala along with Imam Husain. The descendants of that

Brahmin call themselves Husaini Brahmins. They have a kind of red line around their throat like a ribbon.

Imam Husain couldn't come to India, but we did. So we are not about to leave it now.

(Reza 2003: 47, 2012: 58)

By letting the simple village girl Sitara listen in on these conversations, the author shows us, the readers, how the Shiʿi village of Gangauli creates a specifically religious discourse attacking the nationalist vision of Pakistan. The conversations point to important historical connections between the land of India and the main events in the history of Shiʿi Islam, and in the conversations of these people it is apparent that they see it is as their religious duty to be faithful to India. This talk produces emotional difficulties for Sitara. On the one hand, she realizes from all the heated talk that Imam Husein had wanted to come to India and that any good Shiʿi should be faithful to the land. At the same time, she is in love with the young intellectual from Aligarh, who uses every opportunity to make the case for a Muslim homeland. She can find no way to resolve this contradiction between her loyalty to Imam Husein and her love for Abbas, and this makes her embarrassed even to look at him. She can only ask:

> And what sort of Shiʿi was this wretched Jinnah
>   that he was against (_khilāph_) India?
>   This was a question she wanted to ask Abbas,
>   but there was no harm in asking Sarwari instead. [. . .]
> "Ba'ji, what's Pakistan?" she finally asked Sarwari one day.
>   'It's a country (_mulk_) that will be made for the Muslims,
>   'replied Sarwari like a great scholar.
> "What is a country (_mulk_), Ba'ji?"
> This question completely stumped Sarwari as she
>   didn't know what a country was either.

(Reza 2012: 59)

Through conversations such as this, the author shows us that the Shiʿi population of Gangauli was not prepared for an all-encompassing Muslim nationalism. They also show how difficult it was for educated people like Abbas to present their universalistic nationalist ideas to Shiʿa villagers, who hardly knew the word "Pakistan," had no idea of what a state or country was, and had no clue why a separate state should be necessary for Indian Muslims.

Conclusion

What can we conclude about the status of Muslim nationalism in the fiction of Reza? In classical modernist theories of nationalism, one characteristic feature of the social organization of agrarian society – as opposed to industrial society – is its internal boundaries (Gellner 1996: 9). Both horizontal and vertical cultural borders are obstacles to the feelings of unity and a communal or national identity. Two individuals are not of the same nation if they do not have a common culture: a modern society requires a degree of cultural homogeneity. Thus, the national leaders who steered South Asian societies into the nationalist age had a twofold task: vertical and horizontal cultural boundaries had to be broken down, or at least lowered, for a feeling of shared culture and shared destiny to arise among people from different parts of the subcontinent.

To the South Asian leaders of the late nineteenth century, there was no obvious axis around which to build new collective identities. Language, ethnicity, religion, and administrative unity may all have been potential foundations for such new identities in different corners of the globe, but for the nationalists of nineteenth-century India none of them presented themselves as the basis for a strong feeling of unity among all Muslims (Brekke 2002). As Kaviraj has pointed out, for the nationalists of India the nationalism emerged before the community that would carry out the program (Kaviraj 1997: 10f.)

Our two novels show that there were Muslim groups in the 1930s and 1940s, and later, who strongly opposed the idea of Pakistan and had no comprehension of the presumed need for a separate homeland for Indian Muslims. To the local Shiʿa of Ghazipur, home was India and the village, and they simply could not understand how intellectual Sunni Muslims could talk about a homeland far away. The Shiʿa opposed it on practical grounds, and they opposed it on religious and historical grounds, as we have seen. The novels give us an insider's view of a world in which the religious and linguistic divisions *within* the Muslim population were at least as important as the divisions between Muslims and other groups. Thus, they help us understand the difficulties faced by leaders in the 1940s, working to create a sense of nationhood among the Muslims of South Asia.

Notes

1. There is an English translation of *Adha Gaon*, entitled *A Village Divided* (2003), but not of *Os Ki Boond.*
2. "Patā yah calā ki asal cīz muhammad yā kṛṣṇa nahīṃ hai, balki asal cīz 'kālī kamalī' hai" (Reza 2010: 37).

3. English (Reza 2003: 223) and Hindi (Reza 2012: 239). For the English reader, such explanatory additions from the translator are useful to highlight Reza's subtle use of language to convey conflicts, differences, and irony. At the same time, this might have been solved using a different strategy, such as writing in different styles of English for the educated men from Aligarh and the simple people of Gangauli.

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Afterword: Nations and Fictions

Daniella Kuzmanovic

Is it still relevant to explore the novel in the context of nations and nationalism in the Muslim world? Is it not other, audiovisual, techniques that have come to dominate in the dissemination of the ideology of nationalism? However, as Gregory Jusdanis points out in his chapter, it is against the backdrop of European nation formation that "the relationship between nationalism and literature [became] a symbiotic one" (cf. Anderson 1983). Literature gave nation form, and nation gave literature its privileged status as a central marker of the "high culture" that characterizes a particular nation and its people. The contributions to this volume, moreover, speak of the continued importance of looking also at literary fiction to explore the interplay between nation formation and religion in the Muslim world. Literary production's centrality to nation formation is, for example, evident in the case of Kurdish literature (see Hashem Ahmadzadeh's chapter). Here, the production of a distinctive Kurdish literature, including the novel, has long been central and integral to the struggle for the recognition of Kurdish identity – Kurds as a distinct nation and people – and for a Kurdish nation-state.

The Kurdish case indicates just how potent the idea of nations as characterized by their "high culture," in the form of literary works and other cultural productions, still is in the West, and thus how the idea is still central in legitimizing the claims for the nation outside the West. National political and cultural elites still produce canons on cultural products such as literature, whereby the nation becomes tangible through linguistic codification rather than merely imagined, and whereby such elites simultaneously reproduce themselves as the natural caretakers of the nation (following Bourdieu 1984). Implicit in this is the dominant and strong association of the national collective with one or more particular languages. Even if the novel, and literature more

broadly, has a much more marginal position in the dominant public imagination of the nation in the mostly postcolonial nation-states of the Muslim world, the ability to have produced and continue to produce literary works still serves as a symbolic marker among national elites, which distinguishes "a people" from that which is uncivilized and backward. One has only to recall how Arabic poetry is promoted by national elites as a sign of the sophisticated and civilized character of the Arab people in the global community of "other civilized cultures and nations," thus legitimizing their place in such a community. Yet, literature is often simultaneously promoted as an indicator of "an indigenous/inherent culture" that marks "a people" off as unique within the community of "civilized, modern nations."

Perhaps the very tangibility of print culture should not be underestimated in understanding how nations-as-fictions are powerful and able to move people. Although the role of grand monuments and museums for the nation, Western and non-Western, as well as other national paraphernalia has been extensively studied (see, for example, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Gillis 1994), the tangible quality of print and the codification it implies deserve even greater prominence in this regard. Consider the role of documents in nation-states. Yael Navaro-Yashin makes a case for the role of tangible objects in producing affect. Such objects, she proposes, based on ethnography from northern Cyprus, are also able to transmit affect over time. This affect is "mediated and qualified by the knowledge that the people who come into contact with it have about the context for the object" (2012: 212). Hence, the ability of tangible objects like print to move those who interact with them is not due to a pre-social disposition, but rather the result of particular socio-histories whereby letters have come to stand for a nation, quite literally inscribing nation on to members of the community. Here nation should be seen within the larger processes of modernization, wherein literacy plays a central part. The ability of print to move people is clearly noticeable in national contexts marked by explicit language reforms as part of the nation-building project, such as in Turkey (see Azade Seyhan's chapter). Here the new national elite, the Kemalists, promoted a thoroughly comprehensive language reform and literacy initiative as integral to the making of a new, enlightened citizen, a key player in relation to reaching the "level of contemporary civilization." But the example of the power of letters to move people is also clear from the Quran, where the mere sight of the script moves those who see it, even when they are not able to read it. It is not for nothing that a central argument against language reform in Turkey in the 1920s was that the

script of the Prophet was to be replaced by something different (Snyder 2009).

No doubt, literature has been a tool to maintain and promote particular nationalist ideologies and to consolidate particular national elites, including in many nation-states of the Muslim world. But this was not invariably the case, and therefore much depends upon socio-historical circumstances, as Tetz Rooke's and Søren Hebbelstrup's chapters on Libya and Yemen, respectively, remind us. However, as Jusdanis cautions us in his chapter: "[T]he majority of literary texts never embraced this political agenda. Rather, these texts actually showed a nation divided, insecure, and pulled in opposite directions." Indeed, such insecurity, ambiguities, and complex relatedness to nation, religion, violent pasts and presents, as well as to processes of modernization constitute a major theme in all the chapters of this volume. The complex and ever-shifting identities and the role of popular religion in the political modernization processes depicted in the novel set in Kirkuk (Sami Zubaida's chapter) is but one example of this. Another example is the exploration of the intersection of rationality and religious thought in two literary works from Iran on utopia and dystopia, respectively (Claus Valling Pedersen's chapter). Each work paradoxically uses a central technique of the modern, that is, print culture, to probe and question modernity. A third example is the reflections on whose voices should be heard in the nation, as can be discerned in the analysis of selected novels from postcolonial Morocco, where the marginalized or subaltern in Moroccan society are given voice (Florian Kohstall's chapter). However, as Zaur Gasimov's analysis of a central literary work associated with Azerbaijani nationalism reminds us, such ambiguities and complexities not only challenge official national ideologies or national elites, they also allow central literary works to be accepted by elites. The play *The Book of My Mother* was accepted by the Bolshevik elite despite its criticism of Russia, because it also explicitly criticize religion, thereby aligning itself with Bolshevik ideas.

* * *

In a recent article, Didier Fassin reflects on the similarities between ethnography and fictional literature. He argues how the two genres share a common quest not only to relay reality, that is, that which exists or has happened, but also to present truth, that is, that which "has to be regained from deception or convention" (2014: 41). In this regard, he draws on Martha Nussbaum, who has argued that literature "is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact

with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not oth-erwise met, but also, vertically, so to speak, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, more precise than much of what takes place in life" (Nussbaum as quoted in Fassin 2014: 41). Such an experience is not just about what takes place in life, I would add though, but also about the very fabrication of sociality.

The mostly insecure, ambiguous, and polyphonic character of liter-ary fiction reflects how literary works are indeed works of mediation. This is a storytelling strategy whereby particular authors "transform private into public meaning" (Arendt in Jackson 2002: 11, 15). In *The Human Condition,* Hannah Arendt emphasizes storytelling as the medi-ating presence in-between personal and social meaning, which makes sociality possible and forms the basis of publicness. But storytelling is also a coping strategy whereby words come to stand for the world, as Michael Jackson proposes in his *The Politics of Storytelling.* He thus extends Arendt's thoughts on storytelling by taking them on to exis-tential terrain (2002: 18). "[W]hile storytelling makes sociality possible, it is equally vital to the illusory, self-protective, self-justifying activ-ity of individual minds" (2002: 15). He then goes on to outline how storytelling, in whatever form, constitutes a means whereby humans experience a sense of agency, and thus of being:

> In stories, the energy that motivates the journeys and quests that articulate movements to and fro between contrasted fields of being, arises from an existential imperative that compels human beings to transform the world as it is felt to bear upon them into a world in which they, both as individual subjects and as members of collectivities, feel they play a vital part.
>
> (2002: 30)

In other words, from this vantage point, the authors of the various works of fiction analyzed in this volume are also simply human beings that use literary narratives as a means to alter the balance between the world as given and the world as something they have a hand in mak-ing. However, whereas this balancing act is an existential endeavor at heart, it can also be a reflexive political endeavor performed through fiction writing. Abdelkader Aoudjit's analysis of *Nedjma* reflects this. As Aoudjit argues, by revealing the power-knowledge nexus of colonial historiography, the novel aims to offer a glimpse of the contours of a new nation to an emerging Algerian national collective. This new nation is one in which Algerians are masters of their own destiny. Likewise,

Saudi women novelists turn to chick lit and the realm of a neoliberal cosmopolitan fantasy, which the Saudi state elite has created room for in the post-9/11 period in order to challenge dominant taken-for-granted notions of society and religion (Madawi Al-Rasheed's chapter). Al-Rasheed cautions us not to read these women novelists through an orientalist gaze and viewing their output as heroic works of resistance. Rather, they are attempts to stretch the boundaries of the nation, she states. This can, though, I argue, also be read as a strategy to write their gendered selves anew into and onto a national collective reshaped by neoliberal cosmopolitanism in order to alter the relationship between what is given and what they have a hand in making.

The broader storytelling perspective reminds us that such narrative practices have, for one, not lost significance or "credibility as a model of existential order as some postmodernists have claimed" (Jackson 2002: 20). Furthermore, and of even greater relevance here, such a broad perspective also reminds us that storytelling can take many forms and be performed through various media. Likewise, Arendt in *The Human Condition* cautions us to be aware of the techniques of dissemination, as well as how such techniques give form to publicness (Arendt in Jackson 2002: 11, 15). I bring this up in the context of a book on *Novel and Nation in the Muslim World* because, whereas literary texts were undeniably part of the production of nationalisms in Western Europe (cf. Anderson 1983), other (audiovisual) media have since emerged and play a central role in the formation of various kinds of nationalism in the West as well as in the Muslim world. One example is the radio (see, for example, Ahiska 2010), another, of course, is TV (see, for example, Abu-Lughod 2004). Indeed, as Torkel Brekke points out in his chapter in this volume on the works of Rahi Masoom Reza, this Indian novelist is far better known for "his many successful Bollywood scripts" than for his novels. This is a quite telling remark.

In other words, nations and nationalisms are today produced through other "sensoscapes," just as counter-publics can be constituted through them (Hirschkind 2006). Print culture does not, it must be stressed, exclude the significance of other "sensoscapes," since print can be disseminated through soundscapes, for example. Just think of the act of reading aloud. Nevertheless, such shifts in "sensoscapes" compel us to explore first what the role of particular senses is in relation to the construction of various forms of nationalism and of national collectives, and, second, how this intersects with the idea that certain techniques, for example, print, are central and privileged in the construction of the imagined community of the nation. The tangible form of the nation

is, after all, not a given but socio-historically constituted. What is then of interest is whether the historical relationship between print culture and nation has led to a privileging of long, epic narratives relating to the nation as imagined community, narratives that are then reproduced and reaffirmed through other media. At least, as the chapters in this volume show, such storytelling through literary works, with their implied insecure, ambiguous, and polyphonic character, provides fertile ground for thinking about the continued role of the epic narrative for the production and reproduction of the ideology of nationalism.

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